Commentary

VOLUME NINETY-TWO • NUMBER SIX • DECEMBER 1991

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The Politics of Public Television

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The Rise & Fall of Deconstruction

Peter Shaw

Is Secular Humanism Good for the Jews?

Irving Kristol and Critics

Books in Review:
Paul Johnson on "Scandal"
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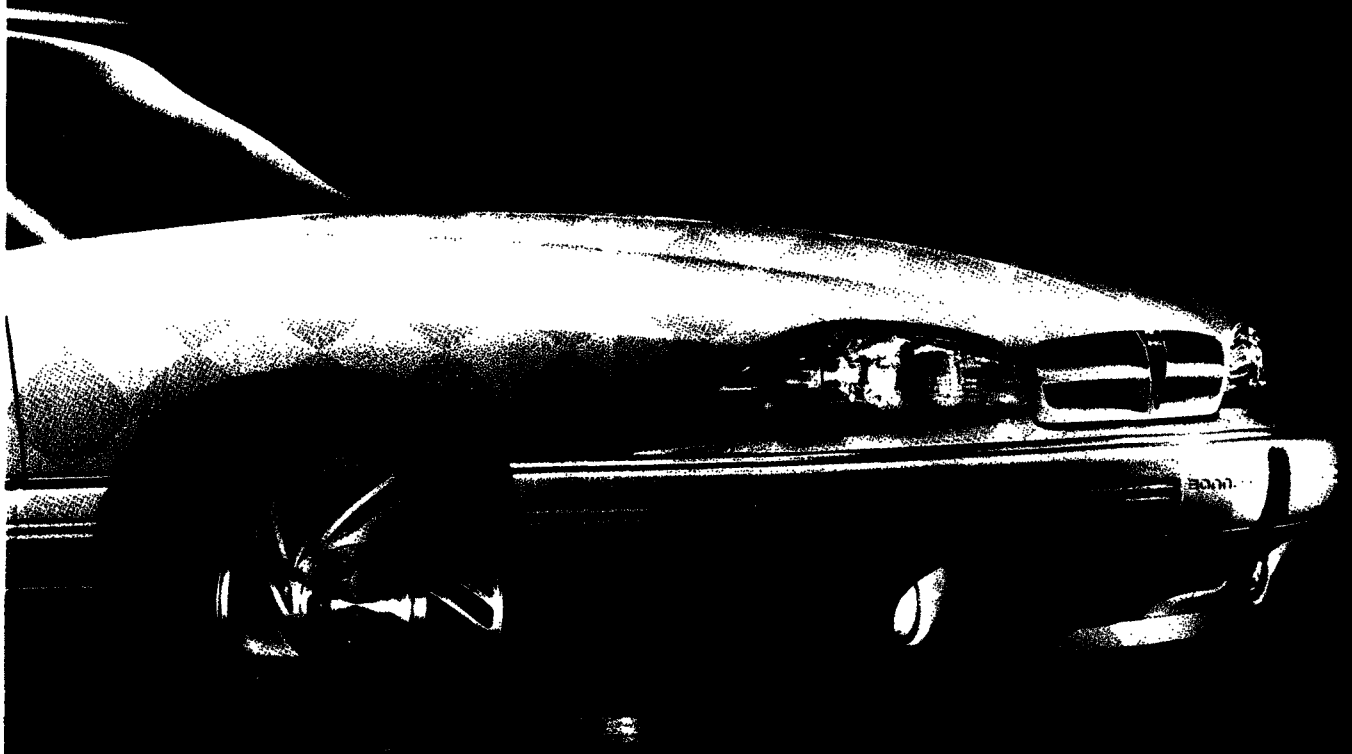

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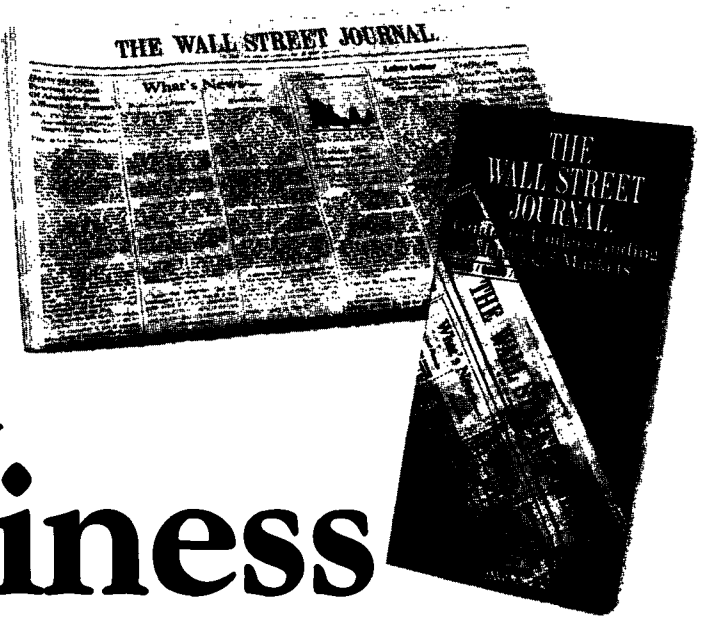

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Letters from Readers

Is Secular Humanism Good for the Jews?

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol, in "The Future of American Jewry" [August], maintains that "the death of socialism" and "the collapse of secular humanism" represent a turning point in the 20th century, all of which he welcomes. He argues that secular humanism provides "the religious basis of socialism."

There are several doubtful aspects to his argument. In the first place, there is no necessary connection between socialism and secular humanism. Indeed, one can be a secular humanist and a free-market libertarian (witness the followers of Ayn Rand), or a socialist and a religious believer. Second, secular humanism is *not* a religion. . . . What it does is to provide a moral code by which to live and a naturalistic interpretation of the universe and the human species within it. . . .

Mr. Kristol claims that secular humanism cannot "deliver . . . a moral code," only religious faith can. But he overlooks the vast tradition in Western civilization—from Aristotle and Kant through Mill and Dewey—that has demonstrated that we can abide by the moral virtues and ethical values, and develop character in the young, independent of a religious framework. . . .

Mr. Kristol further maintains that the most influential thinkers in the 20th century have not remained loyal to secular humanism, and that the main current of thought in American universities is "post-modernism." As a trenchant critic of American intellectual life, especially its flirtation with left-wing Marxism, Mr. Kristol is hardly in an appropriate position now to refer to deconstructionist tendencies in the universities to support his case. Post-modernism, like Marxism, has been thoroughly discredited. The social praxis of Heidegger and its relationship to Nazism have been shown.

One salient fact that Mr. Kristol overlooks is that secular humanism has been responsible for the defense of human rights and democracy, and that it has rejected both totalitarian Marxism and Heideggerian fascism. The leading secular-humanist philosopher that America has produced in the 20th century—Sidney Hook—clearly expressed the secular-humanist outlook.

Mr. Kristol believes that we should accept the end of secularism, and a "Christian America," and he considers anti-biblical criticism by secular humanists a form of "barbarism." But why should we be sanguine about the reemergence of fundamentalist orthodox religiosity in America and the bridging of the principle of separation of church and state? The danger is that religion may again become destructive as in the past—witness the resurgence of ethnic hatred in Eastern Europe. Does he believe that we have nothing to fear from a new Holy Inquisition? By offering responsible criticism of the claims to Divine Truth (based on the Bible or the Koran), may we not temper that possible assault? The secular state may be the only defense against patriotic theocrats, who, in the name of God, will seek to suppress dissident minorities and again compromise human freedom.

PAUL KURTZ
Editor, *Free Inquiry*
Buffalo, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . The difference between secular humanists and theologists is that the latter are already privy to many insights into the meaning of the universe and debate only nuances, while the former are still searching. But does not this also show that secularists cannot be "leading meaningless lives in a meaningless universe," as Irving Kristol contends, but are actually leading exciting lives in quest of meaning and as part of the grand adventure of philosophy and science?. . .

Mr. Kristol's definition of secular humanism is also decidedly arbitrary. The actual definition is really quite simple: a non-reliance on any super-being in shaping our lives; an acceptance of the realities of the world we know; a pursuit of the best interests of humankind. Man is the measure of all things, not God. . . .

Secular humanism is the converse of what we call religion and to call it a religion, as Mr. Kristol does, is a perverse attempt to belittle it. . . . Mr. Kristol engages in the same deliberate befuddlement when he refers to the recent events

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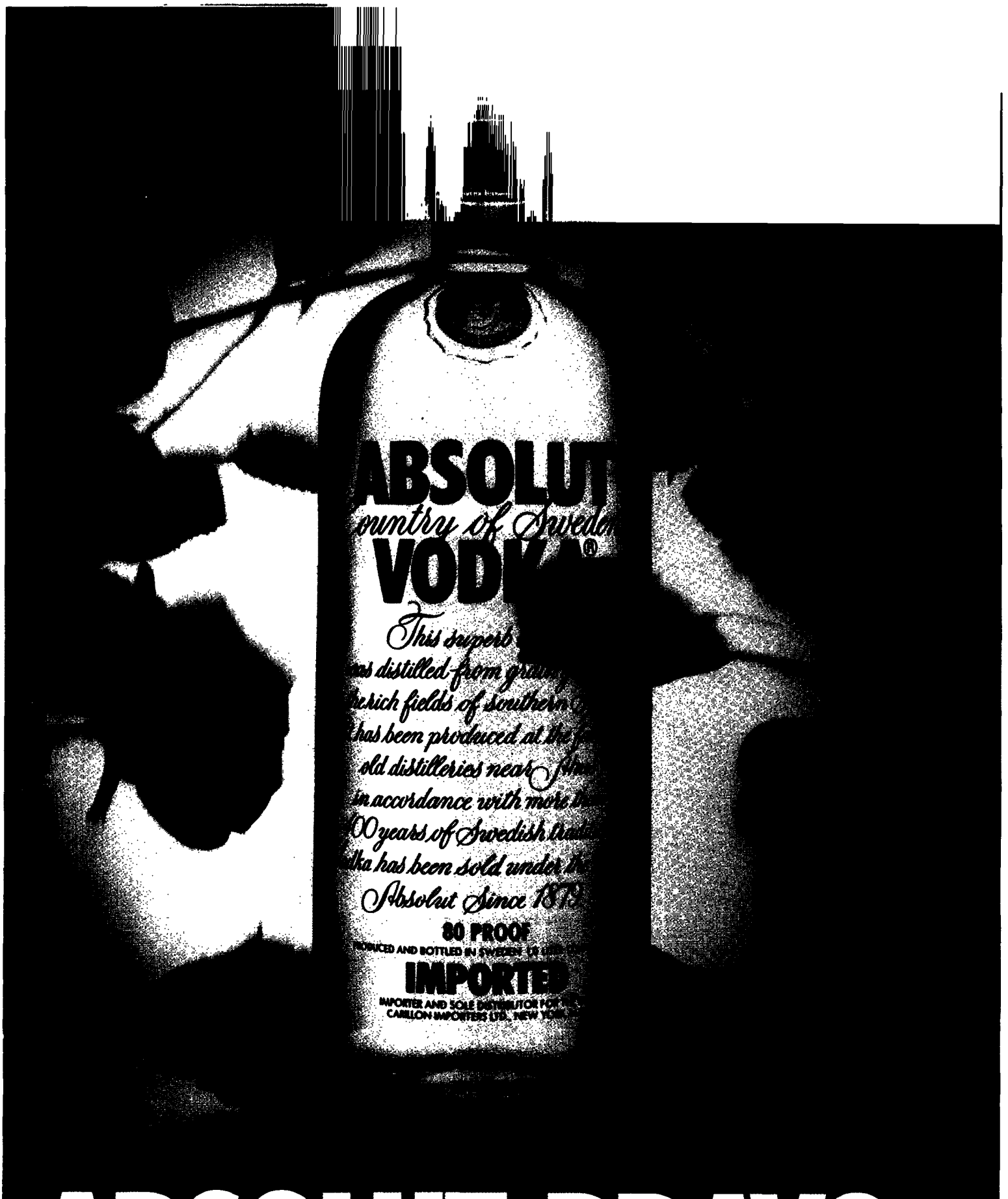

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in Eastern Europe as "the death of socialism," as if he is unaware that it was totalitarian Communism that was stamped out and not the socialism which continues to be very much alive all over democratic Western Europe.

He then moves on to the hoary notion that only religion can inspire morality. "One accepts a moral code on faith," he writes, "pure reason can offer a critique of moral beliefs but it cannot engender them." One wonders whether he is here offering the impeccable record of religionists down through the ages by way of proof. And as for the appalling record of secular humanists within our society, . . . is he faulting the moral motivations of such professed socialists as Eugene V. Debs, Norman Thomas, Sidney Hook, and A. Philip Randolph? Can he, indeed, recall the names of people who led more meaningful, purposeful, moral, and idealistic lives than these men? . . . .

WILLIAM STERN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol describes socialism as "atheistic" . . . and regards atheism as an essential part of the socialist system. I do not agree. I believe that Dennis Prager, editor of *Ultimate Issues*, had it exactly right many years ago when, in my hearing, he replied to a contention that the Soviet leadership, by getting rid of religion, had eliminated persecution on religious grounds by pointing out that all they had done was to replace worship of the Father, the Son, and the Church with worship of Marx, Lenin, and the party; thus, religious persecution in the USSR was not only as rampant as it had ever been but was of the same quality.

The point is that every tyranny imposes what is in effect a state religion, whose central tenet is that the rulers must be obeyed without question. . . . The Soviet system was bad because it was tyrannical, and the excuses invented in an effort to justify that tyranny should not affect our judgment of it.

Are we really to conclude, however, that the treatment of Jews in 19th-century Russia was morally superior to their treatment in the Soviet Union because (1) the czars claimed to rule by divine right and worked together with an established church; (2) men of the church condoned persecution and instigated pogroms, so participants were laudably fulfilling a religious obligation; and (3) that sort of thing had been done for hundreds of years and so must have been right? Mr. Kristol does not say any of this explicitly, but there is an unpleasant undertone to that effect throughout his article.

Mr. Kristol's elucidation of the concept of "moral code" is, to put it mildly, a remarkable innovation. He says that a list of principles does not deserve to be called a moral code unless those principles conform to the way of life of our ancestors! But Americans have, by and large, adopted the ideas that democracy is a good thing, that a person's religion is basically his own business, and that women should not be regarded as automatically inferior and subordinate to men, even though our ancestors did not live that way. Does Mr. Kristol regard this as evidence of lack of morality on our part? Would a medieval Irving Kristol have denounced the then-new rule that a wife could not be divorced without her consent as a violation of the traditional Jewish moral code? . . .

SAMSON M. ROSENZWEIG
North Brunswick, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's article presents some problems. Mr. Kristol asserts that though many Americans "go to church or synagogue for psychological reasons (consolation, hope, fear), very few educated people actually think that their immortal souls are at stake as a result of their beliefs and actions." I would like to have seen some evidence supplied for this somewhat breathtaking statement.

In 1990, when asked by the Gallup organization, 40 percent of those queried had attended church in the last seven days. Seventy-four percent of those queried by Gallup in 1990 professed to believe in Jesus Christ. A 1983 poll conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White for *Time* magazine found that 56 percent would definitely not vote for a candidate for President who did not believe in God. Are they all just trying to avoid the expense of paying a quack $125 for a 45-minute hour on the couch? Are modern America's educated any less religious than, say, Jefferson and Madison? Is church attendance always a psychological condition? Or is Mr. Kristol simply transferring his own doubt or disbelief onto others? . . .

Later on in his article Mr. Kristol tells us that secular humanism has collapsed as "an ideal," from which he concludes that "religion will play a more central role in American life." Possibly both assertions are right, but they are only assertions. I would like to see some proof that secular humanism is defunct as an ideal and I would like to know why its collapse necessarily elicits a growth in religion. . . .

Without offering any evidence that secular humanism is losing its grip, Mr. Kristol asserts that this is so because of secular humanism's "two fundamental flaws": (1) no moral code fortified by a sense of the sacred and (2) humanism's consequent credo that life is meaningless. Well, on the secular humanists' behalf, let me say that people can live reasonably in society and abide by its laws without having a religion or a sense of the sacred. Many have. As for his contention that "no community can survive if it is persuaded . . . that its members are leading meaningless lives in a meaningless universe," as I said above, most Americans are not in this vacuous condition. As for those who are or claim to be, they usually survive for a long time.

Finally, whatever the condition of secular humanism, Christianity in America has gone through periods of revival dating back to the Great Awakenings, as Perry Miller makes clear in *The Life of the Mind in America*. If we are on the threshold of another revival, that is fine by me, but, again, give us the evidence. To claim that an undemonstrated moribundity in secular humanism is leading to a rebirth of religion is only argument by assertion.

R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.
Editor, *American Spectator*
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's argument seems to me powerful and sound, . . . though much of his discussion is more accurate when applied to a minority of Americans (what I would call the "university-oriented" segment) than to the general population. . . . For example, some 40 percent of Americans, roughly speaking, have been quite religious for some time and have never been secular humanists. . . .

Part of the problem in discussing this subject is an absence of appropriate language and forms, beginning with the lack of a good def-

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A view from Washington

Nuclear Waste: Steady Progress to a Known Solution

Americans live in fast forward. We prize quick results and easy answers, fast food and instant gratification. I sometimes wonder if we are losing our capacity to understand and manage complex issues and difficult problems that demand steady, persistent, long-term attention.

This certainly seems to be true of nuclear waste.

I cannot count the number of people who have told me that they would gladly support construction of new nuclear power plants to meet our growing need for electricity...if only we knew what to do with the nuclear waste.

The fact is, we have known what to do with nuclear waste for over 30 years, long before the world's first nuclear power plant started up at Shippingport in Pennsylvania, in the late 1950s. We knew then that we would isolate the waste deep underground, in stable rock formations, locked away behind carefully engineered barriers, and monitored to ensure that radioactive material does not escape.

Thirty years of study and analysis have confirmed the wisdom of this approach. It is endorsed without question by leading independent scientific organizations around the world, including the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the American Physical Society, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment. "There is no scientific or technical reason to think that a satisfactory geological repository cannot be built," said the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council last year. "There is a strong worldwide consensus that the best, safest long-term option for dealing with high-level waste is geological isolation."

Where does the U.S. nuclear waste program stand? In 1987, Congress ordered the U.S. Department of Energy to conduct a comprehensive scientific evaluation of Yucca Mountain, a remote spot in the Nevada desert, as a possible site for safe, permanent nuclear waste disposal. Yucca Mountain seems to have the necessary requirements. It's isolated. The climate is arid. And the area seems geologically stable.

The Energy Department is conducting a massive scientific investigation of Yucca Mountain, which will determine whether it is a suitable site for nuclear waste disposal.

This may be the most comprehensive, careful and systematic assessment of a piece of real estate ever conducted. It will require 10 years of on-site and laboratory investigations and analyses, cost more than $4 billion, and involve some 500 scientists and engineers. And at every turn, the scientific work is monitored by independent agencies, including the National Academy of Sciences, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board (an independent group of experts appointed by the President), the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the General Accounting Office and the state of Nevada.

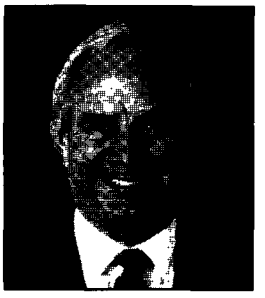
If the scientists conclude that Yucca Mountain is suitable for nuclear waste disposal, we can all have complete confidence in that decision, and in the process that produced it.

It is true that the U.S. nuclear waste program and the work of Yucca Mountain have experienced setbacks. The Energy Department did not have a permanent director for the program from 1987 until 1989, and this lack of leadership caused delays. The Department's choice of a contractor to manage the program day-to-day was challenged in court, which led to further delays. And the state of Nevada has delayed the scientific work at Yucca Mountain, by refusing to grant necessary permits.

Fortunately, the Energy Department program now has a permanent director and a prime contractor, and all the state's challenges have been struck down in court. The U.S. nuclear waste program is now firmly on the right track.

Let us remember that periodic setbacks are almost inevitable in any program as lengthy as this one. There will probably be occasional reversals in the years ahead, but ingenuity and persistence will overcome those, too.

Nuclear waste disposal is a serious undertaking. It deserves careful, methodical treatment. This is no place for quick and easy answers. You cannot see a glacier's movement with the naked eye, but that does not mean the glacier isn't moving. The process of evaluating possible sites for nuclear waste disposal is slow because it should be deliberate and careful. Progress will not always be visible from day to day, or even from year to year. But don't make the mistake of assuming there is no progress.



Phillip Bayne
President and CEO
U.S. Council for Energy Awareness

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inition of the words . . . "religion" and "religious." Without delving too deeply into the question, I think it fair to say that a person's "religion" is the set of ideas and practices that tells that person about God, about non-human authority, about transcendent causes and obligations, about after-life and salvation. A person can have at most one religion at a time, but as many "religious affiliations" as he or she wants. There are many people who have no religion, though they do have a religious affiliation and belong to a synagogue or church. . . .

Mr. Kristol is saying that most American Jews have not been religious. They have felt uncomfortable with the idea of God or of God's authority over them even though many feel part of a people to whom they want to stay attached. Many such people affiliate with Jewish religious institutions, either to serve various social or psychological functions, or out of commitment to the Jewish people, or because of a reluctance to sever their roots. Some get a strong sense of meaning and purpose from non-religious Jewish activities. But none of these things makes one a religious Jew. . . .

In general, most American Jews have felt comfortable with non-religious Jews and non-religious Christians as well as with people having no religious affiliation at all, and less comfortable with religious Jews and religious Christians, i.e., with any "believers," whether of the sophisticated or fundamentalist variety. . . .

Mr. Kristol points out that religion is on the rise in the U.S. (as it also is, incidentally, in other places such as Central America and the Philippines). . . . He predicts that during the next generation the long march of secular humanism through our institutions and culture will be reversed. Since Jews were at the heart of—and very disproportionately represented in—the movement which imposed secular-humanist ideas and values on our educational system, our entertainment, our law, and throughout our culture, . . . the retreat from these positions will be felt by many to be a defeat for Jews and Judaism. It will not, however, be a defeat for religious Judaism or for religious Jews. (And it can only be good for Jews as individuals, unless secular humanism is replaced by something worse.). . . .

Judaism today is characterized by two opposite trends. The trend that is still much stronger is the decline in commitment to Judaism by non-religious Jews as the number of generations from believing ancestors increases. Intermarriage is often a visible and critical stage in this process. The other trend is the rapid increase in the number of religious Jews—starting from a very small base. The future of Judaism depends on the interaction between these two trends. Looking at the average of the two groups (the large declining group and the small rapidly growing one) provides little useful information.

If one sees the future of Judaism as having only two possibilities—either Judaism atrophies and probably disappears, or there is a revitalization (and reform) and expansion of religious Judaism—then the growth of religion and the decline of secular humanism in the U.S. can only be seen as cause for hope and a source of joy.

MAX SINGER
Chevy Chase, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Irving Kristol predicts that the defects in secularism are about to lead to a momentous revival of old-time religion in America, probably of the Christian variety. He asserts that Jews will have to come to terms with this at their peril. Perhaps they will become more "observant," certainly they will have to become more accommodating to Christian demands for such developments as prayer in the schools. This is no big deal, he asserts. Far worse is the possibility that the decline in secularism will lead to some "anti-biblical barbarism." By this he seems to mean some as-yet-to-be-formed pagan religion that is neither Christian nor Jewish. One really has to be a prophet to make this kind of prediction with any degree of confidence. . . .

Mr. Kristol recommends that Jews adapt to the inevitability of Christian revival, and, for example, support school prayer. The forecast of revival is, as I have stated, a matter for prophets. . . . Yet with regard to prayer in schools and other church-state issues, even secular humanists can make some reasonable predictions, without the use of prophetic vision. Republican administrations have succeeded in moving the Supreme Court on these issues, and change in Court doctrine is, and will be, the result. But this, although serious, is not an event of permanent apocalyptic revolution. Democratic Presidents can reverse the trend. Republicans may discover the risks of ignoring public sentiment for separation of church and state and the rights of privacy. . . . A society based on religious conformity and religious intolerance is anathema to the good life. I have no doubt that Jewish organizations, despite Mr. Kristol's recommendation to the contrary, will use the democratic processes to continue the fight to preserve liberty and freedom, and rights to religious plurality.

In the past, Irving Kristol has warned us against the dangers of Communism. He was a worthy warrior in that campaign. Now he is warning us about the dangers of secularism and counseling us about the value of religion. . . . But the varieties of religious belief and the complex relationships between religion and science and humanism in modern life are subtle and sometimes baffling. We cannot recreate religious belief as it existed centuries ago. Perhaps we do not want to. We cannot simply utter the word "religion" and leave it at that. In order to be relevant insofar as Jews are concerned, Mr. Kristol will have to enter into the rich density of Jewish belief (and disbelief) and explore in a scholarly manner the current Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform movements and their philosophers. You cannot further the debate by simply telling the Jews, as he does, that they must become more "observant." Not in a Jewish culture where the religious cannot even agree as to who is a Jew, and what the role of women is in religious leadership.

NICHOLAS WOLFSON
University of Connecticut
Hartford, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I am neither a conservative nor a liberal, yet I am opposed to the concept of prayer in the public schools. I fear the growing conservatism of the Supreme Court, especially with the appointment of Judge Clarence Thomas, only because of the religious issues that are bound to be brought before it. I grew up with prayer in the schools in the Bronx and experienced its evil consequences. I know of the neighborhood Catholic priest who taught the doctrine of Jewish deicide and therefore hatred of Jews, especially during Easter. The rise of conservative religious funda-

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mentalism throughout the world does not bode well for religious tolerance, let alone respect. Inevitably it will be accompanied by anti-Semitism. . . .

Mr. Kristol claims that secular humanism cannot deliver a moral code and that it is the function of religion to instill such a code along with respect and reverence for the moral traditions of one's forefathers. But what moral codes have Christianity or even Islam instilled that are adhered to by their faithful and that—in light of the horrors perpetrated on Jews throughout history—are deserving of respect and reverence?

Mr. Kristol implies that science and rational thought are incapable of creating a moral code on their own. I do not know whether there is such a thing as a natural moral code. Yet there well may be one that can be discerned from the study of ecology and evolution. We are now finding evidence of a biological bias against incest, for example, and there have been interesting discussions concerning the biological basis for altruism. Scientists and ethicists have been exploring the possibility of a natural morality for quite a while. . . .

I find it disturbing that in all of his negativity and despair, Mr. Kristol does not speak out more firmly against the techniques of irrationality and untenable belief systems, except for those entailed in New Age and radical-feminist thinking. . . . It is rational thought, not irrational belief systems imposed on unsuspecting children, that will provide the scientific and technological means whereby this world will survive. . . . It is the advocacy of rational thought that is the saving feature of secular humanism and this aspect of it, at least, is worthy of survival, more so than any aspect of Christianity, Islam, or any other organized or disorganized religion. . . .

SHELDON F. GOTTLIEB
Mobile, Alabama

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . My question, after reading Irving Kristol's article, is: where do we stand? Between the hammer of Thor and the cross of Jesus? Between the crass test tube and the sacred parchment? Are we to take up Mr. Kristol's more than faint hint that we had better line up with Patrick Buchanan than with Michael Kinsley or we may find ourselves stood up against the wall by skinhead motorcycle gangs clad in black leather? Will the religious Republicans be better for us and for Israel than the secular-humanist Democrats? . . .

Mr. Kristol is quite honest. What interests him is not God, but opposition to abortion, religion in the public schools, a world of art that is not value-free, a science that has limits, a sex code that does not tolerate incest and promote AIDS. We all want that, but will swinging the pendulum back two centuries bring it about? Can we force ourselves to believe in creationism because the doctrine of evolution leads to nihilism? Or is this approach as grossly pragmatic as the free-swinging opportunism of secular humanism? . . .

I suppose we were mistaken 50 years ago when we thought, some of us, that Communism was going to be useful in destroying our medieval enemy, Christianity. But are we mistaken today when we think, some of us, that the destruction of Communism will bring us the benefits of comfortable protection provided by triumphant Christian soldiers marching onward?

[Rabbi] JACOB CHINITZ
Halifax, Nova Scotia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Frankly, I read Irving Kristol's article out of curiosity. If I am to be labeled, explained, and condemned, I would really like to know why. And what are secular humanists anyhow? Well, to my surprise, they turn out to be the following:

Secular humanists are usually liberal Jews who may or may not show up at the synagogue on the High Holidays, but who are nevertheless guilty of too much pure reason, and fail to listen to their ancestors on the subject of morality. They are guilty of wanting peace, a "fraternal" peace—whatever that means—and universal peace, another character flaw. Secular humanists are guilty of any number of atrocities including undermining two major American religions. They are guilty of being over-tolerant and expansive, and of

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enjoying life as equals in our society.

Worse, they are *not* misogynist, homophobic, or xenophobic. . . . In other words, truly a rotten bunch.

As for the future of the Jews in America, Mr. Kristol states: "If America is going to become more Christian, Jews will have to adapt." Do we really need to hear this? We Jews have adapted for thousands of years without such advice. We have adapted after the burning of the Temple, the slaughter of the Inquisition, the pogroms, the cattle cars to unknown places, the crematoria. We have adapted and survived. . . .

And those of us with too much pure reason (and too much pure heart) hope to survive Mr. Kristol's advice, too.

PHYLLIS WEINER
Highland Park, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Irving Kristol is right in singling out pagans, then and now, as the threat they are to all that is worthwhile about civilization, including the civilization of Judaism. But while the pagans destroyed the Temple and sent the Jews into exile, it is important to point out that at least they did not burn them alive for the greater glory of God. Nor did . . . pagan books inculcate hatred of the "Christ killers" in every schoolchild in Europe. . . . Jews can therefore be forgiven if they are somewhat wary of Christianity, even as benign a form of Christianity as American Protestantism.

The separation of church and state is not practiced in America to ensure the survival of paganism; it is practiced to encourage the survival of religion, as long as it does not presume to hegemony. . . .

The essential point to remember is that it is not legal to delegitimize the adherent of any religion; however, it is perfectly legal to refuse to believe in the tenets of that religion. Thus, while the price I pay for proscribing the prayers of others from the public schools is that my children are also not allowed to say Jewish prayers, the benefit I obtain is that my children are not taught things which I believe to be in error. Our schools may only teach what is common in our patrimony and we live in peace as long as we restrict the teaching of revealed truth to the homes of those to whom it has been revealed. That is why teaching the catechism in a public school is illegal. However, we continue to teach evolution and not creationism because we insist that scientifically verifiable truths remain the standard of the curriculum. If that is secular humanism, so be it: it is also what makes us different from Lebanon and Ireland. . . .

Mr. Kristol's message is that Jews are to refrain from secular humanism if they wish to have "a future" (stay alive? be counted among his best friends?) in an America preparing for the Ayatollah's second coming. However, Mr. Kristol fails to explain why this should be America's future. It is not at all certain that the future of America need belong to some ill-defined, threatening fundamentalism. The future can also be what we, complex and contradictory Jews that we are, want it to be. It can even be, to some extent, what Mr. Kristol wants it to be. It is one of the beauties of our country that the future is our common enterprise, from which no American is *a priori* excluded.

WALTER SCHIMMERLING
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's article is a piece of advice to American Jewry rather than a forecast. He does not predict the numbers of Americans who in 2091 will be observant or the numbers who, with some but not all "Jewish" genes, will instead observe the "common faith"—to use John Dewey's phrase. I confess, up front, that I hope and predict that the numbers will weigh heavily in favor of Dewey, . . . and that all biblical religions will some day be worshipped more as literature than as articles of belief. . . .

My advice is to stick with John Dewey and our great heritage of Western science which Jewish scholars have contributed to in so magnificent a way. That science is likely to move New Age kids back to medicine, physics, mathematics, and literature, and away from nonsense. . . . If you love the specifics of Jewish life, practice them with your children and grandchildren no matter what fraction of their genes are "Jewish." Such practices alone can save the particular Jewish things that so many of us would preserve forever. . . .

JOHN GELLES
Ventura, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Irving Kristol's description of the secularization of American Jews is accurate and, in many places, masterful. Mr. Kristol is right in his main thesis that America's Jews have not adopted Christianity, but rather secular humanism. In saying so, he has rendered a great service by pointing out the misplaced emphasis of so many Jews who still view the world as it existed in the 16th century, and see Christianity as the "real" threat.

Yet when Mr. Kristol turns to explaining this adoption of what he calls "a new, emergent religious impulse," he is unpersuasive. According to him, Jewish advocacy of humanist-liberal positions is best understood as a tactical ploy designed to keep the traditional Jewish enemies at bay. . . .

In my view, . . . the Jewish move toward secularism should be understood as a symptom of genuine disaffection with Judaism. Jews are not using secularism to protect their Jewish identity; they are dropping Judaism and replacing it with secularism. . . . But why? . . . If a moral code is necessary for a better world, and if Judaism provides a moral code but secularism does not, then either the one-third of America's Jews who are raising their children as "nothing" don't care about the world, or, more likely, don't properly appreciate the key role of Judaism in making the world a better place. . . .

While Jews throughout the centuries clung to Judaism under the most harrowing of circumstances, the Jews of America have abandoned it for no reason at all. Worse, they have abandoned it in favor of—nothing. Yet Mr. Kristol, who has been one of American Jewry's most persistent critics over the years for its slavish adherence to liberalism, is unable to point the finger of blame to anything other than a tactical mistake. . . .

DANIEL J. FRIEDMAN
Dallas, Texas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Reading Irving Kristol's article brought back memories of my childhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1920's. P.S. 42, located on Hester and Ludlow Streets, which I attended, had mainly Jewish children, and its teachers were mainly Irish Catholic women. At the weekly school assemblies, the principal read a verse

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from the Psalms which was followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. Among the songs we sang was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which we never associated with Jesus but with the God of Israel and no one else. Before the week of Christmas we drew pictures of jolly Santa Claus.

What was important, however, was that after school, for an hour and a half each day and for two hours on Sunday, many of us attended Hebrew school where we studied the Bible with Rashi's commentaries, the Hebrew language and its literature, and Jewish history. The songs we sang were of "*Eretz Yisrael.*" . . . Twice a year we set out with our blue-and-white Jewish National Fund boxes to collect money for Palestine. On the Sabbath we had services conducted by the children, and after the Sabbath was over, we danced the *hora.*

Placing the Hanukkah menorah alongside the Christmas tree in a public place will do nothing to promote the survival of American Jewry, nor will the struggle to eliminate nondenominational prayers from the public schools. . . . Only a good Jewish education will ensure the survival of Judaism in America.

GERSHON MARINBACH
Kfar Saba, Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's characteristically bold and original charting of American Jewry's future left out one option for Jews. As secular liberalism fades and Christianity blossoms, Mr. Kristol suggests, American Jews will simply have to adapt to the new religious order. However, secularism's decline will leave not only secular Jews but also secular Christians in search of meaning in their lives. It may be that American Jewry will choose to offer Judaism to those on a spiritual search and welcome those who convert to Judaism. If Jews make such an effort, Judaism will not so much adapt to a more Christian America as offer a religious alternative to it, an alternative that many secularists of varied backgrounds will find attractive.

LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN
Stony Brook, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's clever and stimulating article goes off its tracks

You deserve to know the facts about. . .

"Land for Peace"

Can it solve the problems of the Middle East?

There has been much emphasis for years, intensified in recent months, on the "land for peace" formula to solve the long-simmering problems of the Middle East. Translating this slogan into plain English means that Israel should surrender Judea-Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza to the Arabs. They would establish a Palestinian state. Once that happened, it is thought that peace and tranquility would soon come to the troubled Middle East.

What are the facts?

■ The concept of "land for peace" is a totally new one in the history of the world. It was formulated for one specific purpose only, namely to persuade and pressure Israel to give up territories that it has administered since the Six-Day War of 1967. By its victory in that war, Israel wound up in possession of these territories. Contrary to what many are led to believe, the "West Bank," the focus of today's attention, had never been part of any Arab country. It was part of Palestine, a territorial unit that, by the Mandate of the League of Nations and in line with the Balfour Declaration, had been designated as a national home for the Jewish people.

■ Thus, while the concept of "land for peace" is a brand-new one, the concept that to the victor belong the spoils is as old as history itself and had really never been questioned before the days of the Israel-Arab conflict. Our own country, of course, following its Manifest Destiny, has benefited greatly and has consolidated its territory by applying this motto. But Israel followed a different path. From the day of victory in 1967, it waited for an offer of peace from the Arabs. But that offer never came. Instead, immediately following the war, the Arabs pronounced their three unalterable "no's:" no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.

■ In 1977, President Sadat of Egypt traveled to Jerusalem and presented a peace plan to the Israeli government. The Israelis eagerly embraced his suggestion. In exchange for peace and normalization of relations with its neighbor, Israel returned to Egypt the vast Sinai peninsula, together with the city of Yamit; some of the most advanced military installations in the world; the port and naval installations of Sharm-el-Sheik, which safeguard Israel's access to its port of Eilat; and the oil fields that Israel had developed and which had made Israel self-sufficient in its energy requirements. And, of course, Israel also gave up the natural buffer against aggression that the Suez Canal and the strategic depth of the Sinai itself provided. It was a first in history. Never before in the chronicle of mankind had the victor returned conquered territory to the vanquished in order to attain peace.

■ One would expect that the concept of "land for peace" would work both ways. After all, should not the Arabs also make some territorial sacrifices for peace? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Every inch of land held by the Arabs is considered "holy Arab soil" and its possession by the "infidels" (Christians or Jews) is inadmissible, intolerable, a blasphemy and a case for "jihad" (holy war). No compromise, no concession is ever possible. The way the "Taba issue" was finally resolved further illustrates the Arab belief that the "land for peace" principle is basically a one-way street.

■ The "land for peace" formulation is now applied mostly to the Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza regions. Israel's foes, but also some of its friends, urge Israel to yield these regions to the Arabs, in exchange for "peace." But there is no peace, and no peace will come about by Israel's giving up this area of vital strategic importance to those who are its sworn enemies and who have declared over and over again that they wish to use this land as their launching pad for the final attempt at the destruction of Israel. The conflict in the area is not only between Israel and the "Palestinians." It is first of all between Israel and the Arab nations. With the single exception of Egypt, virtually all of them are still in a state of war with Israel.

To none of the Arab countries has the possibility ever occurred of *their* trading land for peace, for instance yielding the "West Bank" to Israel for the sake of peace. Not one of these countries has even hinted that they would make peace with Israel if Israel yielded the administered territories to the Arabs. There isn't even a gesture of accommodation, such as a lifting of the over 40-year-old Arab economic boycott against Israel, an apology for the odious slander that Zionism is Racism, or a discontinuation of the yearly charade in the United Nations, in which the Arab states attempt to expel Israel from that body. For the victor to yield land for peace to the vanquished is a new idea—who knows, it might even be a good one. But it surely would have to work both ways in order to be valid and effective.

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when it begins to argue that Christianity (or some equivalent) may well sprout and secular humanism wither in the years ahead. . . . Mr. Kristol is surely right in saying that secular humanism looks like a religion, but it is for just this reason that it will not fade. Certainly it will not do so because Irving Kristol, among others, holds that its intellectual justifications are hollow. Roman intellectuals, after all, made the same charge of an emerging Christianity, and it got them nowhere.

No, secular humanism is here to stay, with all the potentially negative consequences Mr. Kristol fears it poses for the endurance of American Jews.

BOOTH FOWLER
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a secular humanist, I strongly object to the misrepresentation and gross distortion of secular humanism presented by Irving Kristol. . . .

The first so-called "flaw" Mr. Kristol discerns in secular humanism is a real straw man, riddled with inconsistences. He admits that "Moral codes evolve from the moral experience of communities," then repeats the old cliché that religion is needed to make morality work. But religion and true morality have nothing in common. What the family and community decide is moral is a reflection of morality at the time. . . . Most slaveholders in the pre-Civil War South probably considered themselves good Christians. After the abolition of slavery, their morality was improved, whether they liked it or not. Our Western democracies have improved their morality and decency by throwing out the "moral traditions of their forefathers." Otherwise we would still be in the Middle Ages.

Mr. Kristol's "second flaw" is a blatant misrepresentation of everything that secular humanism stands for. To say it implies that a community's ". . . members are leading meaningless lives in a meaningless universe" is utter nonsense. Secular humanism states that people can lead meaningful, goal-oriented, honest, and moral lives without the false support of religion and superstition. . . .

Mr. Kristol should also have noted a new survey conducted by the Graduate School of the City University of New York between April 1989 and 1990. From this survey, we learn that about 13 million Americans are estimated to have no religion. The trend in American society is away from religion. American Jews will probably have to face a 21st-century America exactly the opposite from Mr. Kristol's prediction: one that is more atheist and secular than religious.

GEORGE ROWELL
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Irving Kristol spends five out of six pages analyzing the political history of American Jewry: the unrequited love affair with liberalism, the abandonment of Jewish values by the Reform and Conservative movements, etc. etc. This is all well and good, but it is diagnosis, not prognosis.

Of the future Mr. Kristol is willing to reveal only that henceforth American Jews will have to "cope" with a "revived Christianity" and guard against "an upsurge of anti-biblical barbarism." Now this is important, but it leaves the crucial question unanswered: what is to be done? One hopes Mr. Kristol will reappear in the pages of COMMENTARY soon to finish what he started.

DAN R. FRIEDMAN
Forest Hills, New York

IRVING KRISTOL writes:

What I find most interesting about the responses to my article is the evidence of just how profoundly secular assumptions and habits of thought have penetrated the American Jewish community. Samson M. Rosenzweig's letter in particular is, in this respect, very enlightening.

The question he raises is, "Are we really to conclude . . . that the treatment of Jews in 19th-century Russia was morally superior to their treatment in the Soviet Union . . . ," and he then suggests that I may actually believe this.

Of course I do. What is wondrous is that a Jew could persuade himself to think otherwise. Mr. Rosenzweig describes both the czarist and Communist regimes as "tyrannies" that engaged in religious persecution, the first on the basis of Christian orthodoxy, the second on the basis of an atheistic orthodoxy, and he then treats such persecutions as morally equivalent. But it is also a fact that under the czarist regime, and despite the persecution and pogroms, Jewish learning flourished, Jewish literature flourished, Jewish synagogues and yeshivas were not harassed, and Jews were free to emigrate. Under the Soviet regime, in contrast, Judaism, Jewish learning and culture, and Jewish communal institutions were all ruthlessly extinguished, while Jews were imprisoned within Soviet borders. So why the bland sense of moral equivalence?

The only explanation I can think of is that a regime which persecutes Jews and all other religions in the name of secular atheism—which is simply an illiberal version of secular humanism—is to be measured by less stringent criteria than is a regime that engages to a far lesser degree in specifically Jewish persecution in the name of Christianity. The universalist impulse associated with secular humanism overwhelms Jewish common sense. This may also explain why, during 75 years of Communist oppression, the major Jewish organizations in the United States saw no reason to get excited about the liquidation of Jewish life (as distinct from Jewish lives) in the Soviet Union. After all, Jews weren't being singled out, were they? They were "merely" victims of an anti-religious campaign, not (for the most part) of a traditional anti-Semitic campaign.

As for the various defenses of secular humanism that are being offered, let me say it loud and clear: some of my best friends have been and are secular humanists. I have no desire whatsoever to persecute members of the sect. While I am in favor of an ecumenical version of school prayer, I insist on secular humanists having the right to send their children to private atheistic schools. What could be fairer to a religious minority?

William Stern reports that secular humanists are "leading exciting lives in quest of meaning and as part of the grand adventure of philosophy and science." Good for them. I just hope they have time to instill in their children such virtues as modesty, fidelity, probity, respect for their elders, and the other values found in the Jewish tradition specifically, and in religion generally.

Paul Kurtz, a philosopher, persists in thinking that the great philosophic tradition of Western civilization "has demonstrated that we can abide by the moral virtues

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and ethical values, and develop character in the young, independent of a religious framework." But where do those virtues and values come from? The great philosophers he mentions have developed interesting ways of *thinking about* morality. But they are not prophets or priests. They do not establish binding moral codes. It is not philosophical thinking that gives us a moral code to live by. Nor is it religious *thinking* that gives us such a code. Such a code is created over time, or accepted over time, by the moral experience of communities, and this moral experience is incarnated in religious institutions. It is by way of passage through these institutions, and participation in these institutions, that the young develop an appropriate moral sensibility. There can be no "Jewish education" worthy of the name that does not at least try to envelop the young in the religious life of the community. For that to occur, of course, you need a community with a religious life.

Spike Lee

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Congratulations to Richard Grenier for his incisive debunking of the Don King of film-makers, Spike Lee ["Spike Lee Fever," August]. Most reviewers—either out of misplaced guilt or peer pressure—seem afraid to expose this director's glaring weaknesses, so Mr. Grenier's piece is very bracing.

To start with, most analysis fails to mention that as a storyteller Lee suffers from a poor sense of structure. He seems to operate from the schoolboy notion that the more subjects one crams into a movie the more profound it is. He cynically attempts to insert a last-minute quotation or a token "good" character to disguise the ugly business he's up to. Though he pretends to tackle the "big" subjects, Lee actually chews a lot more than he bites off. The best that can be said for him is that he is a rather crude polemicist. But in a love story like *Jungle Fever* he is out of his element. He cannot show us real affection or warmth or even lust. Such feelings would get in the way of his agenda. So instead of characters he gives us caricatures and in place of revelation he recycles hysterical clichés.

What is truly appalling about his work, though, is his blatant bigotry. In an era of political correctness, I find his bashing of Jews, Italians, and whites in general to be shocking. His separatist rhetoric on why the races should not mix could just as well be the rantings of a member of the Ku Klux Klan. I think such hate-mongering, whether it comes from Right or Left, should be roundly condemned. And I certainly do not think it should be mistaken for art! . . .

DAN O'NEILL
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In addition to misreading Spike Lee's latest film as anti-white, Richard Grenier's article, "Spike Lee Fever," contains misquotations of the film's dialogue, factual inaccuracies, and unfounded assumptions. Mr. Grenier's obvious unfamiliarity with the issues that are prominent among American blacks renders him nearly incompetent as a reviewer for the film. The fact that Mr. Grenier is not black does not disqualify him from evaluating Lee's work, but attempting to gain authority by engaging a supposed random sample of African Americans is an untenable scam.

Admitting his relative ignorance of issues that are important to black communities, Mr. Grenier relies on second-hand information provided by his black friends that lead him to erroneous assertions. At the beginning of his article, he attempts to argue that the media have inflated *Jungle Fever*'s social importance and states, "the American blacks I have questioned confess privately that they hate it." Granting that Spike Lee's films are more controversial among African Americans than whites, to imply that most blacks hate Lee's films is ridiculously false.

In a second dubious reliance on hearsay, Mr. Grenier asserts that the "war council" scene in *Jungle Fever* is unrealistic. He states: "Well dressed and economically middle-class, these women talk the way *I'm told* middle-class black women seldom talk, like streetwalkers (actually, like Spike Lee)" (emphasis added). Mr. Grenier's informants have, if not deliberately,

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led him astray. The fact is that many middle-class women hold the attitudes and use the language that are depicted in the film. In addition, if he had done his homework, Mr. Grenier would have known that Lee let the actresses improvise during the scene to draw upon their own experiences and impressions, and did not script the scene, as he wrongly implies.

Besides relying on a small pool of black "friends" for misinformation, Mr. Grenier proceeds to commit factual errors about the film's content that suggest he was not paying attention despite professing to have seen the film twice. In one short passage concerning Flipper's ignored request to have a black secretary, he makes two glaring distortions:

> His former secretary, now departed, was a "sister," which is to say black, and the management of the firm has provided him with a temporary replacement who is white. Flipper protests vociferously. Perhaps he is struggling to increase or at least maintain the number of blacks employed by the firm, but if so he never mentions it; what he actually says sounds as if he simply does not like working with white people.

First, despite the assertion that Flipper's former secretary, was a "sister" (Mr. Grenier's term, not Flipper's), the ethnicity of Terry, the previous secretary, is never mentioned. Second, contrary to Mr. Grenier's claim, Flipper has specifically requested that a black secretary be hired for the vacant position, and when his request is ignored and he is suddenly presented with a secretary who happens to be Italian American, he asks in protest why he is the only black person working in the firm's office. To my mind, this constitutes a rather explicit desire to "increase or at least maintain the number of blacks employed by the firm." In a minor infraction, Mr. Grenier also mistakenly refers to a character named Lauren as Orin throughout a paragraph describing an important subplot in the film.

In his attempt to debunk Lee's presentation of serious issues that concern African Americans, Mr. Grenier cruelly belittles genuine injustices that beset many blacks even today. He assails Lee for exploring the issue of skin color in *Jungle Fever* "to the point of obsession." Yet, sadly, the pigmentocracy constructed by white supremacists in America continues to have pernicious effects on all too many black Americans. Mr. Grenier glibly dismisses the scene where Flipper is denied a well-deserved partnership in the architectural firm as a scenario that could "only have been introduced to prove that the black man will never get justice from whitey." Yet the glass-ceiling phenomenon that Lee dramatizes is perceived widely by black professionals, and has been documented by Elizabeth Dole's Labor Department. Mr. Grenier may have a point when he states that Lee's execution of the scene is flawed by portraying Flipper's employers as unrealistically intransigent, but to suggest that the issue of equitable promotional policies at the top of the corporate structure for historically excluded groups is an ideological fabrication is dishonest. Despite his evident lack of knowledge concerning many aspects of the lives of American blacks, Mr. Grenier seems to believe that he—with his second-hand sources—is a better judge of what is plausible to portray in films that depict the lives of blacks than Spike Lee.

In a tortured interpretation, Mr. Grenier presumes Flipper to be "our hero." But Lee creates Flipper to be anything but heroic. He is an adulterer who betrays a loving family to pursue an affair, based on a superficial fascination with racial differences, with a woman he doesn't even love. When Flipper and Angie part company Mr. Grenier writes, "Flipper . . . shows virtually no remorse over his unfeeling behavior, having done at last, *I suppose*, the right thing" (emphasis added). Flipper is absolutely not the object of our admiration, nor the possessor of good judgment.

Contrary to Mr. Grenier's specious claim that Spike Lee is stridently anti-white, Paulie and Angie, of Bensonhurst, are portrayed as the most noble characters in the film. Angie does appear to have more than superficial feelings for Flipper, and Paulie evaluates people as individuals and not on racial assumptions. Neither Angie, Paulie, nor Vito and Sal of *Do the Right Thing* (the major white characters in Lee's brief career) embodies Lee's supposed "assumption that whites feel a limitless and nearly insurmountable hatred toward blacks." Mr. Grenier's simple-minded formulation simply does not square with the facts.

Finally, Mr. Grenier's utterly fantastic conception of Hollywood's benevolence toward black directors would be laughable if it were not so at variance with the cruel facts. The 1970's black-exploitation films that he refers to depicted blacks in derogatory roles as pimps, pushers, prostitutes, and engaged in other illicit pursuits. Mr. Grenier alleges that the market for these pictures evaporated after the initial enthusiasm of blacks subsided. A part of the story he fails to mention is that many blacks, and the NAACP in particular, waged a campaign to stop the negative images that these movies promoted. There was a long drought between these films and Spike Lee's remarkable breakthrough. Strangely, Mr. Grenier claims that Lee's accomplishments are unmerited when he says:

> He benefited from considerable favoritism in winning his first Cannes prize, and his talen is so negligible that if he were not black I suspect he might never have found the financing to make a single movie in America. Spike Lee, in fact, is a product of Hollywood's real if unofficial affirmative-action program.

This lie is so vicious that it cannot be attributable to the benign methodological sloppiness, or to the innocuous willful ignorance demonstrated in other parts of his article. Mr. Grenier provides no evidence for his claim of favoritism at Cannes. Spike Lee's initial film, *She's Gotta Have It*, was independently financed on a minuscule budget of $170,000. Lee raised money from independent investors, benefited from a grant from a small coop for independent black filmmakers, and in addition sold T-shirts on street corners. A large factor in Lee's success is his considerable entrepreneurial acumen. He owns his own film-production company and merchandise stores. Despite the fact that all of his films have been financial successes, he has continually had to haggle over film budgets with stingy studios. The Hollywood establishment has done Spike Lee no favors. To imply otherwise is a gratuitous insult, and a shameful attempt to negate Lee's hard work.

But of course the real problem that makes the emergence of Spike Lee "an unattractive situation" for Mr. Grenier is the black-nationalist tilt displayed in his films. If Mr. Grenier finds Lee's politics dis-

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tasteful, why doesn't he say so with honesty and candor? . . .

At the front end of his article, Mr. Grenier makes a comparison between Woody Allen and Spike Lee. I find it inconceivable that COMMENTARY would permit a review of one of Allen's films to appear that was written by someone who knew nothing about Jews (except, of course, what he learned from questioning his Jewish friends), and that contained several mistakes and outright lies. Why this kind of negligence for one of Spike Lee's pictures?

ERIC BRYANT RHODES
Cambridge, Massachusetts

RICHARD GRENIER writes:

My thanks to Dan O'Neill, who puts the case against Spike Lee very well. I quite agree that, woefully short on artistic talent, Lee is little more than a "rather crude polemicist."

Eric Bryant Rhodes's letter I find somewhat overheated. An "untenable scam"? Beneath my "supposed" random sample am I concealing a scientifically calculated sample? His letter contains an extensive list of factual errors. I do not "imply that most blacks hate Lee's films." Far from it. What I certainly don't imply but say outright is that more blacks seemed to like Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City*, which takes a far more benign view of black-white relations. Mr. Rhodes has only to check major Hollywood studios' box-office returns to see this for himself.

As for the way middle-class black women talk when they are among themselves (whether or not they talk like streetwalkers), I am perfectly willing to accept instruction, but not from Mr. Rhodes, who, as far as I can tell, is not a black woman and hence is also operating on "hearsay." His faith in the veracity of actors' improvisations is touching. Mario Puzo had sharp differences with Francis Ford Coppola on how his movie mafiosi should behave in *The Godfather*, with Coppola insisting that all his actors, when called upon to improvise, had produced an adorably vivid bit of stage business. Puzo finally exploded: *"But they're not mafiosi! They're actors!"* Black actresses these days might be almost as foul-mouthed as white actresses, which is saying something. But if respectable female members of the black middle class, preferably with church connections (Drew's father-in-law is a minister of the gospel, remember), would care to step forward to testify that among themselves they talk like streetwalkers I shall listen with respectful interest.

I am perfectly aware that Spike Lee is a great crusader for hiring blacks, but if Mr. Rhodes thinks that the extremely discourteous way Flipper initially treats his new white "temp" is the pure product of his personal affirmative-action program, and that if there were only enough blacks employed by the firm he would have greeted the white temp with warmth and affection, I can do nothing for him. On the face of it, Flipper's initial rudeness to Angie the temp, his sexual conquest of her, and then his very cold dropping of her later on, would appear to be some kind of race vengeance. In my article I made no reference to the "glass ceiling" at the top of America's "corporate structure." In any case, Flipper is not at the corporate "top." Mr. Rhodes must know that at Flipper's professional level (and even at Harvard, a place not unfamiliar to me) blacks enjoy what I can only call substantial advantages. Am I "cruel" to point this out? I can only repeat that Spike Lee's presentation of the white world as having a uniform, ice-cold, systematic determination to prevent an even conspicuously talented black man from getting ahead is fanciful. If Mr. Rhodes believes the white world has this inflexible determination he is under a pernicious delusion.

The reader is free to speculate as to who this "Lauren" is Mr. Rhodes is talking about. The cast list of *Jungle Fever* issued to the press by Universal Pictures names Paulie's girlfriend, played by Tyra Ferrell, as "Orin," exactly as I have it. There is no "Lauren" anywhere to be found.

Is or is not Flipper the film's "hero"? I am at a loss here to explain Mr. Rhodes's extraordinary insistence. A hero, after all, is not necessarily a saint. Julien Sorel, in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, commits adultery. Is he then the novel's villain? In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, is not the adulterous Antony a "tragic hero"? Is everyone wrong on this score but Mr. Rhodes? And what of *Jungle Fever*'s emotional ending: Flipper, with a cry of anguish, clutching to his bosom a black street prostitute? Is it "tortured" of me to think that Spike Lee intends this to be seen as a highly humane and even epiphanic action? As for Angie and Paulie being the "most noble" characters in the film, I don't think Mr. Rhodes would have much difficulty—if the movie's race relations were turned upside down and all the blacks were white and all the whites were black—in seeing that Angie and Paulie are *Jungle Fever*'s Uncle Toms.

I would like to suggest to Mr. Rhodes that I know rather more than he does about the Cannes Film Festival (having attended many times as a newsman), about the way films are financed in Hollywood, about the way they are distributed (more important), and even about the history of black-exploitation movies. Was the Richard Roundtree character in *Shaft* a pimp or pusher? I remember him, and he has been so described, as a "black super-cop." On the mechanics of how Hollywood not infrequently lets its heart get the better of its head on Left-liberal causes, I refer Mr. Rhodes to my "Hollywood's Foreign Policy: Utopianism Tempered by Greed" in this summer's issue of the *National Interest*. He will find in the article quite a bit of chapter and verse.

Is Hollywood filled with racists? Maybe, but if so they are remarkably discreet. I've never met one yet. I do, in fact, find Spike Lee's black-nationalist politics distasteful, and my article, "Spike Lee Fever," makes this perfectly clear. Mr. Rhodes might be interested to learn that I have written at least two rather long articles about Woody Allen for this very publication, some of the material for which was obtained by "questioning Jewish friends." Despite his disclaimer, Mr. Rhodes labors under an assumption I have encountered before: that the life experience of a person of color is so different that whites can know absolutely nothing about it, whereas all its mysteries are immediately unlocked by other people of color.

Well, well. I read of myself: vicious, incompetent, erroneous, ridiculous, cruel, dishonest, shameful, tortured, specious, simple-minded, laughable, utterly fantastic, scam, distortion, willful ignorance, lie, lies, and, worst of all, "benign methodological sloppiness." Mr. Rhodes really knows how to hurt a guy. I had intended to end my reply with an oratorical burst, pleading youthful poverty, stoutly maintaining I have not a

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racist bone in my body, and finally throwing myself on Mr. Rhodes's mercy as a true friend of the black man. But on rereading his letter I have abandoned the plan. I have the sad feeling that Mr. Rhodes's mind is made up.

Multiculturalism

To the Editor of Commentary:

Midge Decter has done it again. Her article on multiculturalism ["E Pluribus Nihil: Multiculturalism and Black Children," September] is by far the best piece of writing on that topic yet to see the light of day. Not since her treatment of homosexuality ["The Boys on the Beach," September 1980] some ten years ago have we seen an essay which, in addition to being lucid and convincing, explains how to think through a current, complex, and misunderstood social phenomenon.

Would that "E Pluribus Nihil" could be reprinted in hundreds of publications. It might help those in authority who agree with Miss Decter to screw up the courage to maintain that sound position.

Stanley Goldstein
Briarcliff Manor, New York

To the Editor of Commentary:

It is a terrible thing to destroy the psychological fiber of young people already disadvantaged, when it is that which they need most to succeed. Thanks to the nuns and his grandparents, Clarence Thomas broke through the veil of victimization. . . . So did Frederick Douglass, and so too, today, have Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, and other distinguished blacks who grew up disadvantaged and who are now vilified by white liberals and black "leaders."

The message from Sowell, Williams, and Thomas is that the days of *de-jure* discrimination are gone, and this message, along with the fact that the messengers are black, is the reason for their castigation. If the truth were told, the white liberal/black leadership axis would be out of business due to irrelevancy. But they have held on by shifting the ground from individual rights to often misanalyzed group statistics. . . .

As Midge Decter now informs us, the final barricade, and the one at which the fight will be fought most viciously, is in education. As a last, desperate act, the white liberal/black leadership axis attempts now to demean and destroy the ethos of the American dream and its foundations, to declare it a false and hypocritical hope, and to substitute . . . and enshrine a system of competing interests, which they will arbitrate. If they succeed, these modern-day inhabitants of Orwell's Manor House . . . will survive. The rest of us, particularly the poor, young blacks in our inner cities, will be destroyed.

Frederic Wile
New York City

The Litigation Explosion

To the Editor of Commentary:

Regarding Terry Eastland's review of *The Litigation Explosion*, by Walter K. Olson [Books in Review, September], does Mr. Eastland really think trial lawyers need instruction in understanding litigation? Does he think they do not understand that when they sue someone the defendant has *two* lawyers against him? The plaintiff's lawyer is obliged to milk the case to the maximum; but the defense lawyer has precisely the same aspiration. The defendant (or his insurance carrier), caught between these two piranhas, faces the dilemma of whether to pay extortion to settle or face the equally extortionate costs of defense and depend upon the response of a potentially capricious jury to the plaintiff's mail-order "expert" witnesses. The defense lawyer is the plaintiff's best friend because the higher the cost of the defense, the greater the pressure to settle. Guilt or innocence becomes irrelevant, because it is just as costly to defend in either case. Even an innocent man eventually finds that it's cheaper to settle.

Regardless of outcome, the defendant *always* pays. It's only a matter of how much, and which lawyer gets the larger piece of the pie. . . .

In a settlement the defendant (or his carrier) pays the defense lawyer's fee and costs, and the plaintiff's lawyer's fee (one-third or more of the residual settlement after his costs are first deducted). Of the total paid by or on behalf of the defendant, the injured party may receive as little as 10 percent, and this often comes many years after the fact. I know this from my 37 years as a medical specialist during which I was the victim of four meritless suits that dragged on for an average of *five years* each.

When trial lawyers cry that contingency fees protect the rights of the poor to sue, in reality they are concerned about preserving their rights to ride roughshod over many innocent defendants who have absolutely no rights in this process, except to pay the bills.

Trial lawyers also know that there is a better way—binding arbitration. The victim can present his claim to a panel of legitimate experts. Compensation is paid, if indicated. Lawyers are unnecessary. Such a system would more equitably compensate the deserving without rewarding the frauds, speed up the process, and vastly reduce costs to which lawyers inordinately contribute.

Trial lawyers really do understand all of the above. They just do not want the rest of us to understand it. Why should trial lawyers want to give up this terrific scam voluntarily?

Joel I. Hamburger, M. D.
Southfield, Michigan

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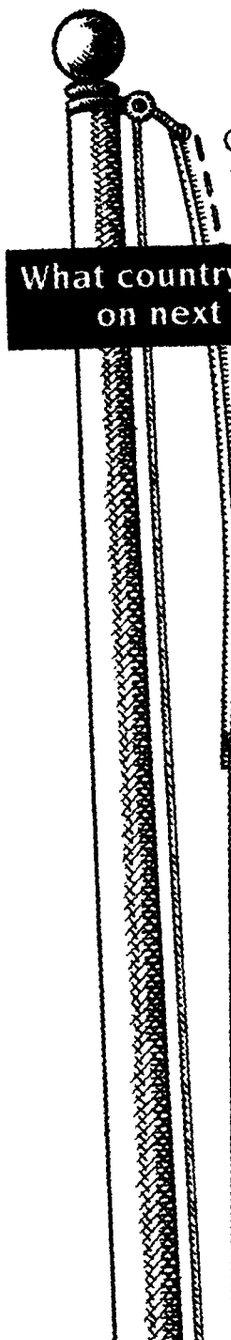

What country will you depend on next year for fuel?

Goodness, how dependent we've become on foreign oil. Who'd ever think that when it came to heating our homes and fueling our cars we'd have to rely so much on unpredictable foreign sources. Aren't we tired of being held hostage to whatever prices these countries want to charge? Isn't it time we depended on ourselves for our own fuel and energy? Well millions of Americans already are, by using domestic natural gas. In fact, virtually all of the natural gas used in North America is produced right here in North America. And it's being delivered through a natural gas pipeline that's over one million miles long. (And growing.) It's a dependable and continuous flowing pipeline network including advanced pipeline technologies. Gas is not only accessible, abundant, and efficient, but it's also the world's cleanest burning fossil fuel. And perhaps most importantly, it's ours. Truly, the energy of America.

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Suicide Made Easy

The Evil of "Rational" Humaneness

Leon R. Kass

AMERICANS have always been a handy people. If know-how were virtue, we would be a nation of saints. Unfortunately, certain old-fashioned taboos—brought to you by the people who know the difference between virtue and dexterity—have prevented Americans from gaining the ultimate know-how, the know-how to die. Until now. Riding atop the best-seller lists, outdistancing other manuals of self-help like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, The T-Factor Fat Gram Counter,* and *Wealth Without Risk,* is Derek Humphry's latest book, *Final Exit,** subtitled "The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying." Know-how in spades.

What can one say about this new "book"? In one word: evil. I did not want to read it, I do not want you to read it. It should never have been written, and it does not deserve to be dignified with a review, let alone an article. Yet it stares out at us from nearly every bookstore window, beckoning us to learn how to achieve the final solution—for ourselves or for those we (allegedly) love so much that we will help them kill themselves. Says the Lord High Executioner, Derek Humphry, prophet of Hemlock: I have set before thee life and death: therefore choose death. "Courageous," bleat the media; "Timely." "Rational." "Humane." Is there no one who will call evil by its proper name?

This is not the usual and notorious evil of malicious intent or violent manner; this is humanitarian evil, evil with a smile: well-meaning, gentle, and rational, especially rational. For this reason it is both harder to recognize as evil and harder to combat. Yet, also for this reason, it deserves our most vigilant attention, for it is an exquisite model of modern rationalism gone wrong, while looking oh so right.

Duty requires a few words about the contents of the book. Following an introduction which tells us that the book is "aimed at helping the public and the health professional achieve death with dignity for those who desire to plan for it," the (longer) first of two parts is addressed to the public and especially those interested in "exiting." Here there are 22 chapters guiding the gentle reader ever so gently, step by step, into that gentle good night, from "The Most Difficult Decision" (a mere 3½ pages, ending with "Once these documents [Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney] are completed you are ready to tackle the other aspects of bringing your life to an end"), through (among others) "Shopping for the Right Doctor," "Beware of the Law," "Storing Drugs," "Who Shall Know?," "Insurance," "Letters to Be Written," and "Self-Deliverance Via the Plastic Bag," all leading up to "The Final Act," complete with detailed instructions for doing the deadly deed. Chapter 23 provides a check list of 16 items, after which drug-dosage tables are supplied for eighteen effective drugs. A shorter second part, addressed to doctors and nurses eager to assist, concludes with a short pharmacopoeia, rich in detail and editorial advice. A brief (and one-sidedly pro-death) bibliography, the text of the Hemlock Society's Model Death with Dignity Act, and brief notes about the author and the Hemlock Society conclude the book, save for a copious index from Abalgin to Zyklon-B gas.

DEREK HUMPHRY, who assisted in the suicide of his first wife (though it was a felony), and who (along with his second wife, Ann Wickett) founded the Hemlock Society in 1980, has been the country's leading spokesman and protagonist for euthanasia in all its forms. A journalist by profession, a euthanist by conviction, a diligent student and publicist, he has researched far and wide in preparing this most handy guide. Yet it is not so much his knowledge but his character that makes him a man for modern times.

Consider his virtues. *Up to date*: "Aren't these archaic laws [against assisting suicide] ready to be changed to situations befitting modern understanding and morality?" *Progressive*: "Now is the time to go one step further. *Final Exit* . . . is a book for the 1990's. As a society we have moved on." *Clean and collegial*: "This method [shoot-

LEON R. KASS, Addie Clark Harding Professor at the University of Chicago, is currently the W.H. Brady, Jr. Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. A trained physician and biochemist, Dr. Kass is the author of *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs.*

* The Hemlock Society, 192 pp., $16.95.

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ing] is not favored by the euthanasia movement because it is messy (who cleans up?) and it has to be a lonely act, the opposite of the right-to-die credo, which aims to share the dying experience." *High-minded*: "A method for which I have respect is freezing to death on a mountain. It takes a certain sort of person to wish to die this way: determined, having knowledge of the mountains, and an enduring courage to carry it off." *Thorough*: "Make two copies of this [suicide] note because the police or coroner, if they become involved, will take the top copy and your survivors or attorney will need a copy also." *Considerate*: "Self-destruction by hanging is almost always an act of protest, a desire to shock and hurt someone. . . . Even if it is left to a policeman or paramedic to cut the corpse down, I still think this is an unacceptably selfish way to die." *Orderly*: "If you are now comfortable with the decision to die . . . you should review the following list." (The check list of 16 items follows, concluding with the injunction, "Leave nothing to chance.") *Respectful of competence*: "Unless you are an ingenious and accomplished engineer, electricity is definitely not advised for self-deliverance." *Gracious*: "If you are unfortunately obliged to end your life in a hospital or motel, it is gracious to leave a note apologizing for the shock and inconvenience to the staff. I have also heard of an individual leaving a generous tip to a motel staff." *Cheerful*: "Remember, life is well worth living to its fullest extent"—a homily that wanders illogically into a paragraph about how to achieve long-term storage of your lethal drugs. *Folksy*: "[A television program] featured a member who kept her 'insurance' in a hat box in her closet. That is as good a place as any." *Open-minded*: "Should you use a clear plastic bag or an opaque one? That's a matter of taste. Loving the world as I do, I'll opt for a clear one if I have to." *Helpful to the handicapped*: "As many of the readers of this book will be people with poor sight, it has been set in large type (14-point Dutch Roman type) to assist them." *Resourceful*: "[I]t is always worth an inspection of your medicine cabinet for any barbiturates left over from previous illnesses suffered by you or your family." *Balanced*: "While the Nazi motives were barbarous, ruthless, and unforgivable, the actual deaths [with cyanic acid gas] were swift, though this is small consolation to the families of the killed." *Meticulous*: "Make sure you have absolute privacy for up to eight hours. A Friday or Saturday night is usually the quietest time; there are generally no business transactions until Monday." *Technically precise*: "To compensate for this possible shortfall in toxicity, add one extra capsule or tablet to every ten of the recommended lethal dose." *Tolerant*: "If you consider God the master of your fate, then read no further. Seek the best pain management available and arrange hospice care"; or, "Pious persons may believe in medical miracles and that is their right." *Forthcomingly frank*: "If I ever need to end my own life because of terminal suffering, whether I employed the most potent drugs or the less so, I would still use the plastic bag technique. If you are repulsed by the addition of the plastic bag, then you must accept a 10-percent chance that by some quirk you will wake up, and will have to try again. With the bag, it is 100-percent certain." *Non-directive*: "I am extremely careful not to offer an opinion, but let myself merely be a sounding board, a sympathetic ear"; but also *Authoritative*: "It is imperative that your loved ones know what you are contemplating." *Financially shrewd*: "My advice is that if you are considering self-deliverance from a terminal illness, look at the dates of your [insurance] policies. If they are more than two years old, your family is safe." *Morally superior*: "A nurse who wishes to participate in the euthanasia process should become well versed in the ethics and law of euthanasia particularly as applied in the applicable county, state, professional organization and institution. [But] to know the rules does *not* necessarily require obedience *if there is an overriding moral imperative*" (emphasis added); or, "Never join in the slightest attempt to persuade a dying person to end life. . . . Many laws are specific about the criminality of 'counseling and procuring' a suicide. In any event, *it is ethically a wrong thing to do*" (emphasis added. Question: why is it considered an act of the greatest love and friendship to assist in doing what it is immoral to counsel? Why, if "self-deliverance" is really "in my best interests," should not my true friends be praised for helping me to see it?)

ABOVE all, the author is calm, cool, and collected, and marvelously matter-of-fact. His confident voice of experience guides us through every step of the process, allaying anxieties, dispelling doubts, showing us exactly how-to-do-it. Adopting a tone and manner midway between the Frugal Gourmet and Mister Rogers, Humphry has written a book that reads like "A Salt-Free Guide to Longer Life" or "How to Conquer Fear in Twenty-two Easy Lessons." The reader, blinded by blandness, nearly loses sight of the big picture: this self-appointed messiah is indiscriminately and shamelessly teaching suicide (and worse) to countless strangers.

Humphry sanctimoniously insists that his book is not intended for everyone.* He intends, he avers, to be helpful *only* to those who are (or will be) *terminally* ill and who wish a quiet release from

* Just after I wrote this sentence, in an eerie coincidence, a telephone call informed me of the suicide of Derek Humphry's (divorced) second wife, an act which he apparently deplored. In a display of despicable shamelessness, Humphry took out a quarter-page ad in the New York *Times* (October 14, 1991) distancing himself and the Hemlock Society from such "irrational suicides." He neglected to mention his earlier penchant for distance: two years ago, he abandoned and divorced this woman when she was diagnosed as having cancer.

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pain, suffering, or indignity. He even publishes a "Euthanizer-General's Warning"—but buries it in the footnotes to the drug-dosage table on the last page of Part 1, after all the lethal instructions have been given—telling us that "this information is meant for consideration only for a *mature adult who is dying* and wishes to know about self-deliverance." His concern for the others is touching, if brief:

ADVICE:

> If you are considering taking your life because you are unhappy, cannot cope, or are confused please do not read this table but contact a Crisis Intervention Center or Suicide Prevention Center. (Look in the telephone book. It may be under "Hotlines.") *An unfinished life is a terrible thing to waste.* [Emphasis added.]

Whom are we kidding? Every since Socrates' attack on writing, everyone knows that one cannot control who reads what is written or what is done with it. Only a fool could believe—and only a knave would pretend—that Humphry's instructions will be heeded only by the desperately dying or that his belated, brief, and saccharine advice to the depressed will lead them to re-embrace their precious unfinished lives.

The Centers for Disease Control have just reported that one in twelve American high-school students (grades 9-12)—or nearly 276,000 teenagers—tried to commit suicide in 1990, and more than one in four seriously contemplated it. Of those attempting, one in four—2 percent of the entire population—sustained serious injuries. (The rate of "successful" suicide attempts is roughly eleven deaths per 100,000 students, or 365 teenage suicides per year.) Thanks to Derek Humphry's book, our youth need no longer fail. Though the drugs he recommends require a doctor's prescription, they are, in fact, ubiquitous and easily available, as he surely knows ("Inspect your medicine cabinet for any barbiturates left over . . ."). And thanks to his instructions about sleeping pills, alcohol, and the proper way to use plastic bags, successful "self-deliverance" is available to anyone who can read—or who has a "loving friend" who can read. Even if only one teenager is now helped to suicide, Derek Humphry will have a lot to answer for.

Humphry has no intention of aiding poisoners, any more than he wishes to improve the suicide rate of the young. But he is, here too, equally naive, reprehensibly so. He is not so innocent as to be unaware of the danger, and in one (but only one) brief sentence—buried in the chapter on secrecy, "A Private Affair?"—makes a dashing display of his eagerness to prevent foul play: "I do not propose to name the drugs which are hard to trace because that information could possibly aid people with evil intent toward the lives of others." But such people need not have evil intent; they could be merely compassionate toward senile Aunt Agatha—or just tired of visiting her or of paying the medical and nursing bills. Anyone with homicidal intent has been taught more lethal pharmacology than he ever needs to know—and also how to avoid detection. Just two pages before this pious refusal to help the wicked, Humphry has counseled the aiders-in-dying to refuse permission for autopsy, in order that death might pass as from "natural causes."

EVEN ignoring the intenders-of-evil, the teenagers, and the others whom Humphry excludes from his audience because they are "emotional," not "rational," it is perfectly clear that his intended readership is in fact much broader than the now or soon-to-be terminally ill. In a chapter on "The Dilemma of Quadriplegics," he embraces the principle of self-determination, terminal disease or not: "I respect the right of that small number of quadriplegics who want—either now or in the future—to have self-deliverance without being preached to and patronized by those on the religious Right." Not just terminal cancer but *any* sort of illness can qualify: "Nobody wants to die, yet life with *an incurable* or *degenerative illness* can be *unacceptable* for some people. Therefore, death is the preferred alternative" (emphasis added).

The elderly or the infirm or the demented or the blind—and, presumably, also the lonely or the humbled or the unwanted—are also on Humphry's compassionate and philanthropic mind: "I am not for one moment *advocating* that elderly people, or patients with degenerative diseases, *should* take their lives. It is *too personal* a decision" (emphasis added). Advocacy no, able assistance yes. On the very same page, Humphry coins a new term to cover those who, alas, have no fatal disease to carry them off—"what I call 'terminal old age'"—a euphemism that can now justify death for the not-dying.

Nor is Humphry shy about facilitating euthanasia for people with Alzheimer's disease: "There is a trend in the euthanasia movement to legislate only for physician aid-in-dying for the terminal patient who is rational. . . . But I believe that to duck responsibility for the incompetent patient is a serious gap in our humanitarian cause." Today the rational and terminal, tomorrow the blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb: let there be nothing but compassion (and "aid-in-dying") for those who choose death—and even for those poor "incompetents" whose debility or loss of dignity convinces us that they *would* choose death had they only mind enough to do so. Thus does the right to choose one's own death become quickly mixed up with the right to "choose" someone else's.

One cannot exaggerate the importance of this difficulty, for it is buried by sloppy reasoning and by the (yes) emotional appeal of the insistence on choice. If suicide (and its assistance) is to be

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justified by a right to choose the time and manner of one's death, if the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness or the so-called right of privacy encompasses also a "right to die," then (as Humphry argues) the whole matter is "too personal" and subjective; and the case for suicide need not rest on *any* objective or demonstrable criteria—such as certifiable terminal illness or truly intractable pain. For who is to say what makes life "unbearable," or death "electable," for another person? The autonomy argument kicks out all criteria for evaluating the choice, save that it be uncoerced.

Of course no one, not even Humphry, wants to leave it at that. Instead, reasons are given to justify choosing death: too much pain, loss of dignity, lack of self-command, poor quality of life. These are supposed to add up to a plausible verdict: life is no longer worth living. Such "useless" or "degrading" or "dehumanized" lives now plead for active, "merciful" termination—*choice or no choice.*

THE line between voluntary and nonvoluntary (or involuntary) euthanasia cannot hold in practice, not least because it cannot be sustained in theory. Once suicide and assisting suicide are okay, for reasons of "mercy," then delivering the dehumanized is okay, whether chosen or not. Humphry and his crowd are well aware of the slippery slope. Yet pretending to want only a partial slide, they have both embraced the principle and started us on a decline that will take us all the way—to eliminating everyone deemed unfit.

This is already happening in Holland, as we are now beginning to discover. Humphry, like many other enthusiastic euthanists, touts the Dutch experience of physician-assisted suicide and treats it as a model, presenting a disingenuously rosy picture of the practice.* But the newly emerging truth should help restore sanity. In a recent book, *Regulating Death*,† Carlos S. Gomez reports that the practice in fact ignores virtually all the self-imposed guidelines and standards imposed by the Netherlands Medical Society: physicians sometimes do not seek a second opinion before administering death; they do not report the deed or even note it on the death certificate; where they do report euthanasia, no one investigates the facts; where someone does investigate, the physician controls all the evidence; and—quite clearly—they euthanize some patients who have *not* requested death. The practice is utterly unregulated—no big surprise to anyone who has given the matter any forethought.

Even more alarming is the newly released report of the government's Committee to Investigate the Practice of Euthanasia in Holland.** The report contains the most extensive and most reliable information to date on euthanasia in the Netherlands. Its reassuring conclusions are, to say the least, at great variance with the wealth of disturbing data it provides. Here are just a few of the findings: 25,300 cases of euthanasia (active and passive) occur in the Netherlands every year, 19.4 percent of all deaths in the country. These include 1,000 cases of *direct active involuntary* euthanasia. In addition, there are 8,100 cases in which morphine was overdosed with the intention to terminate life, 61 percent of the time without the patient's knowledge or consent. And there are another 8,750 cases in which life-preserving treatment was stopped or withheld without consent of the patient and with the intention to shorten life. "Low quality of life," "no prospect of improvement," and "the family could not take it anymore" were among the most frequently cited reasons to terminate patients' lives without their consent. In 45 percent of cases in which the lives of hospital patients were actively terminated without their consent, this was done without the knowledge of the families. Are you duly reassured? Hail to the Dutch, says Uncle Derek.

Hail also Dr. Jack Kevorkian, inventor of the suicide machine and self-appointed father of "obitiatry," the doctoring of death. Humphry gives him ten pages, the longest chapter in the book, and praises him for "notable public service by forcing the medical profession to rethink its attitude on euthanasia." Having been present at Dr. Kevorkian's civil trial—I was a witness for the state on matters of medical ethics—and having read his testimony, watched his demeanor in court, read letters in which he promised to "help" a woman who later was found to be suffering merely from treatable migraine, and, above all, having seen the self-serving and manipulative videotape he made of his only conversation with the unfortunate Janet Adkins the day before he helped her to "self-deliver," I feel the deepest shame for my profession that he should be counted a member.

But what does Humphry know or care about medical ethics or the meaning of permission to kill for the doctor-patient relationship? He celebrates the new age in which "physicians are now more likely to be seen as 'friendly body technicians.'" Though he acknowledges the right of individual physicians to abstain for *personal* reasons from assistance-in-suicide, he has absolutely no idea of a *professional ethic* as such, or of why, for several thousand years, doctors have vowed

* Euthanasia and assisting suicide are still illegal in Holland, but the authorities have decided not to enforce the law. Here at home, happy reports about the Dutch practice played a large part in a campaign to make the state of Washington the first jurisdiction actively to legalize killing-on-request practiced by physicians.

† The Free Press, 172 pp., $19.95.

** Portions of the report have been translated for me by a Dutch acquaintance.

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neither to give nor suggest a deadly drug, not even if asked for it.*

True enough, many physicians fall far short of the professional ideal; many lack empathy or rely too heavily on technology. But will it really restore the ethical dimension constitutive of the profession if we permit doctors to become technical dispensers of death? What will happen to the doctor's unswerving allegiance to the patient's best interests once he is entitled to start thinking that death by injection is a possible "treatment option"? Drunk on what passes for compassionate caring, Humphry does not truly care.

Two further passages show his colors. In the first, Humphry helpfully drafts a model suicide note, to be written and signed as "your last letter." Here are the last letter's last words:

> If I am discovered before I have stopped breathing, I forbid anyone, including doctors or paramedics, to attempt to revive me. *If I am revived, I shall sue anyone who aided in this.* [Emphasis added.]

Compassionate words, intended to soften the blow when one finds one's loved one a suicide?

In the second vignette, concerning physician-and-nurse-assisted suicide, Humphry insists that the entire medical team must be informed about time and manner of the planned death. Why? Because "while everything must be done to reduce the stress on the medical team, a degree of emotional involvement in the dying of the patient is eminently worthwhile *to preserve an appreciation of the inherent sanctity of life*" (emphasis added). What kind of man would use "the inherent sanctity of life," no less, as a club to browbeat possibly reluctant nurses or doctors into participating in plans to kill?

No discussion of this book, especially in this magazine, could be complete without commenting on Humphry's respect for the fine work of his German counterparts, expressed at length in the chapter, "The Cyanide Enigma." After a (single) paragraph condemning the Nazi atrocities (but appreciating the swiftness of death by their Zyklon-B), Humphry rehabilitates the German euthanasia of the present day:

> In the 1980's, the situation with regard to the suffering of terminally ill people was as tragic in Germany as elsewhere. Regardless of the terrible connotation given to the word "euthanasia" (which means help with a good death) by the Nazi atrocities, some people felt that compassionate action to help the dying was needed. In 1980, a pro-euthanasia society was formed, *Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Humanes Sterben* (German Society for Humane Dying), by a small group of brave people under the leadership of Hans Henning Atrott.
>
> Unlike other countries, DGHS found it did not need to campaign for a change in the law on assisted suicide. There was no legal prohibition on helping another to die in justified circumstances so long as the request for help was clear and convincing.

The favorite method of DGHS is cyanide; Humphry, though he professes skepticism about peaceful death with cyanide, describes the German technique in minute detail, dosages included. He then goes on to praise "the simple cleverness of the DGHS method," which obviates the need for Zyklon-B gas by having the gas's active ingredient produced in the stomach following ingestion of potassium cyanide in water. Is not German science splendid? Does the high priest of euthanasia think that we have forgotten how to shudder?

Let me not be misunderstood. Dying in our technological age, even in humanitarian institutions, often comes attended by horrors unknown to our ancestors, often as an unintentional consequence of medical success in the battle against death. Medicine or no medicine, mortality remains our lot. Yet our secular and utopian culture does not prepare us well to face this truth and its consequences. Both painful personal experience and serious study for over two decades have taught me to appreciate deeply the anguish and fear of patients and families in the myriad matters surrounding decay and death; I know and feel the horror of the way many of us now end our lives. There are many, many circumstances—too numerous, too particular, too nuanced to lay out in advance—that call for the cessation of medical intervention, even if death comes as a result. There is rarely a good reason for withholding proper doses of pain medication, even if providing effective analgesia runs an increased risk of earlier death. And there is much more that we can do—most of it a matter of human relations, not of technological devices—to support the morale and dignity of people faced with incurable or fatal illness.† But to cross the line and accept active euthanasia, mercy killing, "aid-in-dying," death from doctor's healing hand, "dignified autoeuthanasia," and "self-deliverance"—that way lies madness.

At the very least, we must now open our eyes to the situation before us. We must not allow ourselves to be gulled by euphemisms and by falsely calming images like "final exit." We must not accept Humphry's shallow notion that "dignity" can be delivered by a hypodermic needle filled with lethal medicine. We must not forget the cost-containers and the eugenicists who stand ready in the wings to exploit the "choice" for death, to make sure that the burdensome and incurable take advantage of the deadly option.**

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* See my essay, "Neither For Love Nor Money: Why Doctors Must Not Kill," *Public Interest*, Winter 1989.

† See my essay, "Death With Dignity & the Sanctity of Life," COMMENTARY, March 1990.

** There is not a word in this book about the current economic crisis in health care and the pressures that already throw people with chronic illness prematurely out of the hospital. The partisans of "right to die" and the partisans of "cut the costs," strange bedfellows, are incubating a deadly outcome for the vulnerable, the elderly, and the powerless.

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And, above all, we must not fall for the calm and matter-of-fact talk of "rational suicide."

Calmness and coolness are, by themselves, no proof of rationality. Neither is deliberate planning, or the stockpiling of "magic pills." All human conduct is motivated—by desire or fear or some other appetite or emotion; thought alone moves nothing. However much Humphry talks of rationality—"It was not done out of cowardice or escapism but from long-held rational beliefs"; "Very, very few physicians will prescribe a lethal dose for a fit person. The stigma of being associated with a possible emotional suicide (as distinct from a rational suicide) is too risky"; etc.—the truth is that passions, sentiments, desires drive our every action. In the case of those explicitly addressed by this book, the dominant motives—the true movers of the soul—will be fear, resignation, and despair, or, in other words, the desire to escape. It is surely not pure reason that finds life unbearable.

Let's get serious about "rationality" and reason. Do we know what we are talking about when we claim that someone can *rationally* choose nonbeing or nothingness? How can poor reason even contemplate nothingness, much less accurately calculate its merits as compared with continued existence? What we have in so-called rational suicide is a mere rationality of means, rationality of technique, but utter *non*-rationality regarding the end and its putative goodness. An act of "rational suicide" may be psychologically understandable and (even, in some cases) morally pardonable, but it is utterly *un*reasonable.

Humphry and others contend that it is religious dogma alone, not human reason, which regards suicide as unethical. But this is patent nonsense. Immanuel Kant, whose claim to rationality is second to none, regarded the will to suicide as inherently self-contradictory, and thus, precisely, irrational:

> It seems absurd that a man can injure himself (*volenti non fit injuria* [Injury cannot happen to one who is willing]). The Stoic therefore considered it a prerogative of his personality as a wise man to walk out of this life with an undisturbed mind whenever he liked (as out of a smoke-filled room), not because he was afflicted by actual or anticipated ills, but simply because he could make use of nothing more in this life. And yet this very courage, this strength of mind—of not fearing death and of knowing of something which man can prize more highly than his life—ought to have been an ever so much greater motive for him not to destroy himself, a being having such authoritative superiority over the strongest sensible incentives; consequently, it ought to have been a motive for him not to deprive himself of life.
>
> Man cannot deprive himself of his personhood so long as one speaks of duties, thus so long as he lives. That man ought to have the authorization to withdraw himself from all obligation, i.e., to be free to act as if no authorization at all were required for this withdrawal, involves a contradiction. To destroy the subject of morality in his own person is tantamount to obliterating from the world, as far as he can, the very existence of morality itself; but morality is, nevertheless, an end in itself. Accordingly, to dispose of oneself as a mere means to some end of one's own liking is to degrade the humanity in one's person (*homo noumenon*), which, after all, was entrusted to man (*homo phaenomenon*) to preserve.

So-called "rational suicide" is finally a sophism. Those who preach it and abet it are teachers of evil.

Modern rationalism, whose leading branch is modern natural science and whose purest fruit is medical technology, has certainly made human life less poor, brutish, and short. Yet because, being morally neutral, it knows only the means, never the end, it has left us lost at sea without a compass. Worst of all, blinded by pride in our technique, we do not even suspect that we are lost, that we have become, as Churchill put it, "the sport and presently the victim of tides and currents, whirlpools and tornadoes amid which [we are] far more helpless than [we have] been for a long time." We do not yet understand that the project for the mastery of nature and the conquest of death leads only to dehumanization; that any attempt to gain the tree of life by means of the tree of knowledge leads inevitably also to the hemlock; and that the utter rationalization of life under the banner of the will tragically produces a world in which we all get to become senile and in which our loved ones get to do us in.

The taboos against homicide, suicide, and euthanasia—like those against incest, adultery, and fornication, central insights of the receding wisdom from a more sensible age—are today weak and increasingly defenseless against the rising tide of gentle dehumanization. Yet they are all that stands between us and the flood. Everyone who cares truly for human dignity and decency—that is, everyone who would be truly rational—must now come to their defense, before it is too late.

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The Politics of Public Television

David Horowitz

CREATED by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, the present system of public television is by now one of the last El Dorados of the Great Society. From relatively modest beginnings it has grown into a $1.2-billion leviathan which is virtually free of accountability to the taxpayers who shell out an annual $250 million to pay for the system while also enabling it to get matching grants from private individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Of these private benefactors, the most important historically was the Ford Foundation, especially under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy in the late 60's and early 70's. Having helped orchestrate the Vietnam crusade for both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Bundy became one of a large crowd of liberals to leave the sinking ship of the policy they had charted. In 1966 he found refuge in the presidency of the Ford Foundation. Upon taking this new job, Bundy told intimates that he intended to make public television one of the special objects of his attention, and he then went on to do so.

To be sure, he had something to build on. Before his arrival, Ford had already funded many of the hundred or more educational stations around the country, to the tune of $150 million—a prodigious sum for that period—and had done much to establish the rudiments of a fourth national network.

Before Ford entered the picture, educational stations had been distinctly homegrown, do-it-yourself, garden variety in character. Operating on an average of only eight hours a day and mainly associated with universities and schools, they devoted themselves to no-frills instructional fare, tailored to their respective locales. *Shakespeare in the Classroom, Today's Farm, Parents and Dr. Spock, Industry on Parade,* were typical titles of the programs that were often "bicycled" from one station to the next, because there was no "interconnection" link at the time. The unifying factor in all these educational productions, and the one that distinguished them most clearly from commercial TV, was their low budgets. It was this factor that Ford's intervention transformed.

So great was the change that there is no organic relation between the high-tech professionalism of public television as we now know it and the modest efforts of the pioneers in the field. An hour of *MacNeil/Lehrer* (perhaps the best product of the post-Bundy system) costs $96,000, while a similar segment of a series like *Cosmos* or *Masterpiece Theater* might cost three or four times that much. These figures are certainly much lower than those for comparable commercial shows (partly because of special discount arrangements with unions and talent), but they are still out of the reach of any university or community group.

DESPITE this change from the early days, executives of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) still portray their network as if it were a decentralized service to diverse publics, the very incarnation of America's democratic spirit. A typical statement reads:

> PBS is owned and directed by its member public television stations, which in turn are accountable to their local communities. This grassroots network is comprised of stations operated by colleges, universities, state and municipal authorities, school boards, and community organizations across the nation.

Yet notwithstanding organizational complexities of Rube Goldberg dimensions, and the lack of a single programming authority, the truth is that centralized power dominates public television and creates its characteristic voice. Of the 44 million taxpayer dollars annually available for programs to the 341 separately-owned PBS stations across the nation, fully half the total—$22 million—goes to just two: WGBH in Boston and WNET in New York. (Another $10 million goes to a group of producers affiliated with WNET, to three other stations, and to PBS itself, which brings the centralized total to 77 percent of the funds.) This money is then leveraged against grants from private foundations and other sources by a factor as great as two, three, or even five times the original amount.

The result is that most major public-television

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series—*MacNeil/Lehrer, American Playhouse, Frontline, NOVA, Sesame Street, Great Performances, Masterpiece Theater,* and Bill Moyers's ubiquitous offerings—are produced or "presented" by WNET and WGBH. Others are produced by a group of stations known as the "G-7" (after the tag given to the major industrial powers), often with WNET and WGBH as the dominant partners.*

In creating the new system in the late 60's, its architects attempted to square the circle of a government-funded institution that would be independent of political influence. The result was a solution in the form of a problem: a private body—the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)—that would distribute the government funds. Compromise was the order of the day. The Carnegie Commission (whose report had led to the 1967 Act) wanted the governing board of CPB to be composed of eminent cultural figures; Lyndon Johnson wanted (and got) political appointees. Carnegie wanted a permanent funding base in the form of an excise tax on television sets; Congress said no. But as a sop to the broadcasters, emphasis was placed on the private nature of CPB as a "heat shield" to insulate the system from governmental influence.

Congress also limited CPB's mandate, insisting that it be established on the "bedrock of localism." (The idea of an elite network financed by the taxpayer would have been political anathema.) To prevent CPB from creating a centralized "fourth network," Congress barred it from producing programs, operating stations, or managing the "interconnection" between them. In addition to insisting on the safeguards of a decentralized system, Congress inserted a clause requiring "fairness, objectivity, and balance" in all programming of a controversial nature.

Such was the plan; the product proved otherwise. With Congress having agreed to provide a fund to finance the stations, Bundy recruited David Davis of WGBH for the task of connecting them into a national voice. Together with Ward Chamberlin of CPB, Davis engineered the new interconnection, which began operations in 1970 as the Public Broadcasting Service.

To meet congressional concerns about preserving localism, the new Public Broadcasting Service was to be controlled by a board of directors elected by the "grassroots" subscribing stations. But Ford ensured that they, in turn, would be dominated by the powerful inner circle of metropolitan stations it favored. The new PBS president was Hartford Gunn, the manager of WGBH.

WHILE this process was working itself out, political events were moving in ways that would fatefully shape its future. Until 1968, the disaffected liberals who had a share in creating public television had been engaged in a family quarrel with their fellow Democrats. The Vietnam war had cast them unexpectedly in an adversarial posture toward the anti-Communist liberals who remained committed to the Vietnam policy they themselves had once supported. But in 1968, the presidency fell into unfriendly Republican hands and, worse still, into the hands of the man who, since the trial of Alger Hiss, had been their most hated political antagonist. Now, with Richard Nixon in the White House, the Vietnam nightmare no longer belonged mainly to the liberals.

It was in this period that Bill Moyers joined WNET to begin his intellectual odyssey to the Left. It was in this period, too, that the Ford Foundation announced the creation of a news center in Washington, which would be staffed by prominent luminaries from the media fraternity, several of whom the Nixon White House had identified as political enemies. Among them were Elizabeth Drew, Robert MacNeil, and Sander Vanocur.

The loading of these cannons was duly noted by the White House, and in June 1972, Nixon retaliated by vetoing the CPB funding bill. CPB's president and several Johnson-appointed board members resigned, and were immediately replaced with Nixon nominees. For all the good it did him, Nixon might have saved himself the trouble. Two weeks earlier, five men had been arrested while breaking into the Watergate apartment complex in Washington. By the end of the year, the most watched show on public-television stations was the congressional hearing to decide whether to impeach the President. True to its promise to offer fare that the commercial channels would not or could not provide, PBS featured the hearings on prime time when the networks had turned to other entertainments. The result was a groundswell of support from new members and contributors. Even the more conservative stations, which had been at loggerheads with PBS, joined hands with the center to fight the common foe.

Having humbled the President, the Democratic Congress now rushed eagerly to aid its ally in the Watergate travails. A significant increase in funds for public television was authorized and, more importantly, committed three years in advance. Congress also acted to tie CPB's unreliable hands. Fifty percent of its non-discretionary program grants were now earmarked for the stations as "general support"—a percentage that would rise even higher in the following decade. The stations, in turn, kicked back a portion of their grants into a newly created program fund, further depriving CPB of influence over the system product.

When the dust had settled, CPB, which Nixon had tried to make a conservative redoubt, was discredited and crippled, while the Ford Foundation's protégé, PBS, emerged as the newly dominant power at the center of the system.

* The other five G-7 stations are WETA (Washington, D.C.), WTTW (Chicago), WQED (Pittsburgh), KCET (Los Angeles), and KQED (San Francisco).

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VIETNAM and Watergate: public television's birth by fire in the crucible of these events created its political culture, which today often seems frozen in 60's amber. The one area of its current-affairs programming which managed to escape this fate, ironically, is the one where the battle with the Nixon White House was most directly joined.

Robert MacNeil, as noted, was among the liberal journalists singled out by the Nixon administration as political antagonists. But the program he launched on WNET in 1975, in collaboration with Jim Lehrer, turned out to be reasonably fair and balanced. Originally devoted to a single subject per evening, *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* provided in-depth analysis that network soundbites could not duplicate, and it went on to prosper more than any other public-television show besides *Sesame Street.*

But *MacNeil/Lehrer*—along with a few other "talking heads" shows, most notably *Tony Brown's Journal* and William F. Buckley's *Firing Line*—proved to be the exception. In other crucial areas of current-affairs programming, a different standard was set. Especially in film documentaries, where subjects were treated in a magazine-like setting that made it possible to tell a story whole and with an editorial thrust, the political personality of the system soon showed another, more radical face.

In fact, the protest culture, which everywhere else had withered at the end of the 60's when its fantasies of revolution collapsed, discovered a new base of operations in public television. A cottage industry of activist documentarians had sprung up during the 60's to make promotional films for the Black Panther party, the Weather Underground, and other domestic radical groups, and for Communist countries like Cuba and Vietnam. This group now began its own "long march through the institutions" by taking its political enthusiasms, its film-making skills, and its network of sympathetic left-wing foundations into the PBS orbit.

The integration of these radicals into the liberal PBS community was made easier by the convergence of political agendas at the end of the Vietnam war, when supporters of the Communist conquerors were able to celebrate victory over a common domestic foe with liberals who had only desired an American withdrawal. Another convergence occurred around the post-60's romance between New Left survivors and the "Old Left" Communists, whom cold warriors like Richard Nixon had made their targets. Most liberals shared the radicals' antipathy for the anti-Communist Right, along with their sense that any political target of the anti-Communists was by definition an innocent victim of persecution.

A PRIME EXPRESSION of this liberal-Left convergence was *The Unquiet Death of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg* (1974), a two-hour special which attempted to exonerate the most famous "martyrs" of the anti-Communist 50's, and which PBS described as "the kind of programming that we enjoy presenting [and] hope to continue to present."

What was striking about the film was not just that it cast doubt on the verdict of the Rosenbergs' trial; or that it did so even as massive FBI files released under the new Freedom of Information Act were confirming their guilt; or even that it went beyond the airing of questions about the case to imply that there had been a government frame-up and that the verdict represented an indictment of American justice. What was most disturbing (and prophetic in terms of future PBS productions) was that the film also amounted to a political brief for the Communist Left to which the Rosenbergs had belonged.

Thus, the narration introduced the Rosenbergs:

> With millions of others they question an economic and political system that lays waste to human lives. Capitalism has failed. A new system might be better. Socialism is its name. For many the vehicle for change is the Communist party.

The film then cut to an authority explaining that Communists were people who "believed that you couldn't have political democracy without economic democracy. . . . Being a Communist meant simply to fight for the rights of the people. . . ." The authority was the longtime Stalinist Carl Marzani, a fact that the program neglected to mention.

In 1978, to mark the 25th anniversary of the execution of the Rosenbergs, PBS ran the four-year-old documentary again, adding a half-hour update. The update confirmed just how determinedly ideological some regions of PBS had become.

The original two-hour program had been based on the standard argument for the Rosenbergs' innocence developed in a well-known book by Walter and Miriam Schneir. In the interim, *The Rosenberg File* by Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton had appeared, based on the new FBI materials and on original interviews with principals in the case. While concluding that Julius Rosenberg had been guilty as charged, the authors—one of them a former member of the Rosenberg Defense Committee—were critical of the death penalty and of the prosecution of Ethel Rosenberg, against whom they believed no credible case had been made.

Because *The Rosenberg File* had been so widely praised as a "definitive" account, PBS executives asked the producer of the documentary, Alvin Goldstein, to interview Radosh as part of the "update." Said Radosh later:

> I couldn't believe the final product when I saw it. He cut out everything I said that contradicted his film, and left only the parts that supported his claims: the failure of the government to

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make its case against Ethel, the injustice of the sentence. Whereas our book totally demolished the argument of his film, viewers watching it would think I endorsed his claims. Moscow television couldn't have done better. It was outrageous.

Far from being an isolated example, the PBS treatment of the Rosenbergs proved typical. Individual Communists who were later admiringly profiled on PBS specials included Paul Robeson, Angela Davis, Dashiell Hammett, Bertolt Brecht, and Anna Louise Strong. These were amplified by the collective portrait *Seeing Red* (1986), a 90-minute celebration of American Communists as progressive idealists, and *The Good Fight* (1988), a nostalgic tribute to the Communists who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

In a clear violation of PBS's enabling legislation, this opening to the discredited pro-Soviet Left was never balanced by any reasonably truthful portrait of American Communism; nor was it matched by any provision of equal time to anti-Communists, whether of the Left or Right. Thus, although there were specials on the personal trials of American radicals who had devoted their lives to a political illusion and enemy power, there was nothing on the tribulations of those former radicals who had changed their minds in order to defend their country and its freedom—Max Eastman, Jay Lovestone, James Burnham, Whittaker Chambers, Bayard Rustin, Sidney Hook.

WHILE PBS searched for silver linings in the dark clouds of the Communist Left, it found mainly negative forces at work in those American institutions charged with fighting the Communist threat, in particular the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which became a PBS symbol of American evil. In 1980, PBS aired a three-hour series called *On Company Business*, which its producers described as "the story of 30 years of CIA subversion, murder, bribery, and torture as told by an insider and documented with newsreel film of actual events."

The CIA "insider" on whom the PBS film relied for editorial guidance was Philip Agee, who in a 1975 *Esquire* article had written: "I aspire to be a Communist and a revolutionary." The same year a Swiss magazine asked Agee's opinion of U.S. and Soviet intelligence agencies. He replied:

> The CIA is plainly on the wrong side, that is the capitalistic side. I approve KGB activities, Communist activities in general, when they are to the advantage of the oppressed. In fact, the KGB is not doing enough in this regard because the USSR depends upon the people to free themselves. Between the overdone activities that the CIA initiates and the more modest activities of the KGB there is absolutely no comparison.

Agee had been expelled from the Netherlands, France, and England because of his contacts with Soviet and Cuban intelligence agents, but the PBS special identified him only by the caption "CIA: 1959-1969." When Reed Irvine of Accuracy in Media (AIM) and other critics objected to the program's "disinformation," they were dismissed out of hand by Barry Chase, the PBS vice president for News and Public Affairs. Chase even sent a memo to all PBS stations describing *On Company Business* as "a highly responsible overview of the CIA's history and a major contribution to the ongoing debate on the CIA's past, present, and future."

PBS's next summary view of American intelligence was a Bill Moyers special called *The Secret Government* (1987), which insinuated what no congressional investigation had ever established: that the CIA was a rogue institution subverting American policy. The wilder shores of this kind of conspiracy thesis were subsequently explored in two *Frontline* programs, *Murder on the Rio San Juan* (1988) and *Guns, Drugs, and the CIA* (1988), which leaned heavily on the fantasies of the far-Left Christic Institute. *The Secret Government* was followed by a four-part series called *Secret Intelligence* (1988), which, like all three of its predecessors, rehearsed the standard litany of left-wing complaints—Iran, Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs, Chile—and culminated in a one-sided view of the Iran-*contra* affair as an anti-constitutional plot.

All these programs judged the CIA to be more of a threat to American institutions than a guardian of American security. And while PBS officials continued to pay lip service to the idea of "balance," no sympathetic portrait of the CIA's cold-war activities was ever aired, no equally partisan account of its role in supporting the anti-Communist rebels in Afghanistan or Angola.

In the absence of countervailing portrayals of American cold-war policies and institutions, the indictments presented in PBS documentaries amounted to an editorial position. In the PBS perspective, the United States emerged as an imperialist, counterrevolutionary power whose national-security apparatus was directed not at containing an expansionist empire but (in the words of the producers of *On Company Business*) at suppressing "people who have dared struggle for a better life."

IRONICALLY, this Marxist caricature received a full-dress treatment on PBS channels in 1989, the very year the Communist utopia collapsed in ruins. *The American Century* was a five-part, five-hour series written and hosted by the editor of *Harper's*, Lewis Lapham, which purported to chart the course of American foreign policy from 1900. The final segment traced American cold-war policy from 1945 to 1975. It did not pay tribute to the heroic efforts of containment which would soon result in the liberation of millions upon millions of people from the chains of a tyranny as great as the world has ever known. It rehearsed, instead, the same old left-wing li-

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tany—Guatemala, Iran, the Bay of Pigs—to claim that under the cloak of anti-Communism, third-world progress had become the victim of greedy U.S. corporations and their secret allies in the U.S. government (described by Lapham in relation to Cuba as "the agent of the reactionary past"). This summary segment of the series was called *Imperial Masquerade*, and it appeared in December 1989 even as East Berliners were tearing down their Wall.

The view of America as an evil empire was powerfully reinforced by PBS's treatment of post-Vietnam Communism in other documentary programs. In 1975, PBS aired *China Memoir*, a piece about the Maoist paradise by the actress Shirley MacLaine. So wide-eyed was it that PBS's own chairman was forced to concede that it was "pure propaganda." *China Memoir* was followed by *The Children of China* (1977), which was praised by Communist officials who thought it would help Americans to "understand the new China." The "new" North Korea and the "new" Cuba were also the focus of promotional features in *North Korea* (1978), *Cuba, Sport and Revolution* (1979), *Cuba: The New Man* (1986), and *Cuba—In the Shadow of Doubt* (1986), about which the New York *Times* commented: "At its best, the documentary has a romantic infatuation with Cuba; at its worst, it is calculated propaganda."

As the locus of the cold war shifted to Central America in the 1980's, documentary after documentary appeared on PBS celebrating the Sandinista dictatorship in Nicaragua and the FMLN terrorists in El Salvador. These included *From the Ashes . . . Nicaragua Today* (1982), *Target Nicaragua* (1983), and *El Salvador, Another Vietnam?* (1981). The producers of these programs, all presented by WNET, were the radical activist filmmakers who had come in from the 70's cold (among them: World Focus Films of Berkeley, the Women's Film Project, and the Institute for Policy Studies).

As with its celebrations of American Communism, PBS showed no eagerness to balance this advocacy with other views. In 1983, the American Catholic Committee offered WNET a program critical of the Marxist regime, *Nicaragua: A Model for Latin America?* The Catholic film was based on documentary footage and dealt with government repression of the press, the Roman Catholic Church, and independent labor unions. WNET rejected the film, on the ground that it had "a better way to handle this information."

And indeed in 1985, a *Frontline* program called *Central America in Crisis* did take a critical look at the various sides of the conflict, while in 1986, *Nicaragua Was Our Home*—a film focusing on the plight of the Miskito Indians—was aired in response to the protests over WNET's previous offerings. But for the most part, the "better way" to handle information about Nicaragua turned out to be pretty much the way it had been handled before.

In 1984, for example, the *Frontline* series featured *Nicaragua: Report From the Front* whose message (in the words of the New York *Times* reviewer John Corry) was: "Sandinistas are good: their opponents are bad. There is no middle ground." The same wisdom was the message of two subsequent *Frontline* reports: *Who's Running This War?* (1986), which portrayed the *contras* as Somocistas bent on violating human rights, and *The War on Nicaragua*, which was named one of "The Worst Shows of the Year" in 1987 by the liberal critic of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, John Carman, who called it "shoddy, unfair, and manipulative journalism."

Nor did the PBS approach to Communist movements alter when addressing the conflicts in other Central American countries. Thus *Guatemala: When the Mountains Tremble* (1985) was panned by the New York *Times* as a "vanity film" because of its agitprop character, and the Washington *Post*'s TV critic, Tom Shales, summed it up in the following terms:

> The film is bluntly didactic and one-sided in portraying Guatemalan rebels as noble freedom fighters and Guatemalan peasants opposed to the present regime as the victims of repression, torture, and squalor.

At least four of the programs on Central America which PBS chose to air during this crucial decade before Communism's collapse were the work of a single director and radical ideologue, Deborah Shaffer, whose "solidarity" with the Communist dictators of Nicaragua, and their guerrilla allies in El Salvador and Guatemala, was a proudly displayed item in her *curriculum vitae*. Her most celebrated documentary, *Fire From the Mountain* (1988), an aggressive promotion of Sandinista myths, was based on the autobiography of the Sandinista secret-police chief, Omar Cabezas, while her other films—*El Salvador: Another Vietnam?* (1981), *Witness to War: Dr. Charlie Clements* (1986), and *Nicaragua: Report From the Front* (1984)—all reflected her commitment to the politics of the Central American guerrillas.

In 1988, the Congressional Oversight Committees for Public Television, led by their Democratic chairmen, Representative Edward Markey and Senator Daniel Inouye, institutionalized this revolutionary front inside PBS by authorizing the transfer of $24 million of CPB monies to set up the Independent Television Service (ITVS) as a separate fund for "independent" film-makers. Representing the independents in testimony before the committees were Deborah Shaffer's producer, Pam Yates of Skylight Productions, and Larry Daressa, co-chairman of the National Coalition of Independent Public Broadcasting Producers. Daressa, who later turned up on the ITVS board, was also the president of California Newsreel, flagship of the radical film

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collectives and producer of such 60's classics as *Black Panther* and *The People's War*, a triumphalist view of the Communist conquest of Vietnam.

Biting the hand that had fed him and his ideological comrades so generously, Daressa attacked PBS for knuckling under to "corporate interests":

> Independent producers have found themselves progressively marginalized in this brave new world of semi-commercial, public pay television. Our diverse voices reflecting the breadth of America's communities and opinions have no place in public television's plans to turn itself into an upscale version of the networks. We have found that insofar as we speak with an independent voice we have no place in public television.

But as one veteran member of the public-television community scoffed on hearing this testimony:

> These people are not "diverse," they're politically correct. Nor are they "independent." These are the commissars of the political Left. These are the people who basically owned the Vietnamese and Cuban and Nicaraguan franchises, who got so close to Communist officials and guerrilla *capos* that if you wanted to get access for interviews or permission even to bring camera equipment into the "liberated zone" in certain cases, you had to go through them.

Nevertheless, Congress authorized $24 million in public funds to the artistic commissars of the ITVS, thereby providing the extreme Left with an institutional base in public television.

ALL during its tenure, the Reagan administration battled Soviet-backed Marxists in Central America and the Sandinista dictatorship in Nicaragua. Yet there was no direct White House response to the PBS attacks on its Central American policies, or even to PBS's propaganda war in behalf of the Communist enemy. Far from attempting to control public television through CPB, as the Nixon administration had (unsuccessfully) done, the Reagan White House even reappointed Sharon Rockefeller, a Carter nominee and liberal Democrat, as CPB chairman. Penn James, who handled White House appointments, recalls:

> Our intention had been to remove her as chairman, just as we tried to do with every other agency. But when we announced our intention, her father, Senator Charles Percy, was outraged. He went storming over to the White House and told the President: "If you want my cooperation on the Foreign Relations committee, you'd better reappoint my daughter." So we did.

But with Reagan's reelection and her father's defeat, Rockefeller was replaced as chairman by Sonia Landau. The following spring, a Reagan appointee, Richard Brookhiser, offered a modest proposal to the CPB board. Brookhiser suggested that CPB undertake a scientific "content analysis" of the current-affairs programs it had funded to see if they were indeed tipped to one side of the political scale. The board would be "derelict," he said, if it did not try to assure the "objectivity and balance" of its programming as the 1967 Act had mandated.

It seemed a straightforward request, but the reaction was almost entirely negative. Charges of "neo-McCarthyism" were hurled in Brookhiser's direction, and PBS vice president Barry Chase scolded:

> It is inappropriate for a presidentially appointed group to be conducting a content analysis of programming. It indicates that some people on the CPB board don't fully understand the appropriate constraints on them.

In an interview with the Los Angeles *Times*, Bruce Christensen, president of PBS, was less restrained:

> In 1973, President Nixon in fact tried to kill federal funding for public television through his political appointees to the board, and the kind of chicanery that went on at the time. They didn't do a "content analysis." Content analysis seems to me a little more sophisticated way of achieving those ends.

Such accusations were sufficiently intimidating to stall the proposal. Brookhiser could not secure enough support even from the Reagan-appointed majority to get approval. Meeting in June, the CPB board decided to postpone its decision on the study until September. But before it could do so, a new controversy erupted, which demonstrated just how weak the conservatives' influence on public television was, and how powerful their liberal adversaries had become.

The *casus belli* was a nine-part series on Africa presented by WETA. *The Africans* had been underwritten by more than $1 million in grants from PBS, CPB, and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). When Lynne Cheney, the chairman of NEH, received an additional request from WETA for $50,000 to promote the series, she decided to screen it. Her response was outrage:

> I have just finished viewing all nine hours of *The Africans*. Worse than unbalanced, this film frequently degenerates into anti-Western diatribe. . . . [One entire segment, *Tools of Exploitation*] strives to blame every technological, moral, and economic failure of Africa on the West. . . . The film moves from distressing moment to distressing moment, climaxing in Part IX where Qaddafi's virtues are set forth. Shortly thereafter, pictures of mushroom clouds fill the screen and it is suggested that Africans are about to come into their own, because after the "final racial conflict" in South Africa, black Africans will have nuclear weapons.

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Cheney told WETA that not only would she not finance the promotion of the series, but she wanted the NEH credits removed from the print. "Our logo is regarded as a mark of approbation, and NEH most decidedly does not approve of this film."

CHENEY'S position was in striking contrast to PBS's defense of the series, which was to disclaim all responsibility for the product that bore its imprint. Said Christensen:

> We don't make the programs at PBS, and we have no editorial control ultimately over what is put in the program. . . . Until a series is delivered to PBS for distribution, we have no editorial input or oversight over the producer or anyone connected to the project.

It was an evasion that the bureaucratic complexities of the system made possible. True, PBS did not actually "produce" programs and, in that most technical sense, could not be held responsible for what was in them. But this was to beg the question. As "gatekeeper" for the national distribution of programs, PBS daily rejected projects simply on the grounds that they "did not meet PBS standards." A thick volume of "Standards and Practices" was, in fact, distributed to independent producers warning them that public television had to "maintain the confidence of its viewers," and that, consequently, producers had to adhere strictly to the official PBS guidelines for quality. Moreover, once a series like *The Africans* was aired, it bore the PBS logo, and was promoted and distributed by PBS on cassette and often in companion book form, with educational aids, to schools and libraries. Such activities constituted an active endorsement and, like the decision to air the programs in the first place, was not merely an imposition, as Christensen implied.

In seeking support from the press and Congress, however, PBS executives deployed a more persuasive argument than their own impotence. For NEH or PBS to exert any judgment on the quality of *The Africans*, they claimed, would be to engage in a form of *censorship*. NEH, Christensen told the Los Angeles *Times*, is "not the Ministry of Truth," and warned that if Cheney were to insist on entering the editing room "there will be no NEH funding in public television."

This line of reasoning was more effective but no less spurious. It simply ignored the right (let alone the obligation) of a funder to impose guidelines and conditions on the recipients of its gifts. It also ignored the fact that CPB's own standard contract with producers stipulated that it would be allowed to see rough cuts and make changes it regarded as necessary. Christensen's argument also ignored PBS's own responsibility—emphasized by PBS officials on other occasions—for the character of programs they distributed and promoted.

With PBS again polarized as the public's David against the government Goliath, Brookhiser's proposal was doomed. A move by 57 House members to stimulate an inquiry into the matters that Brookhiser had raised was easily rebuffed by the appropriate committee head, John Dingell. To consolidate these victories, PBS appointed a committee to review its own procedures. Stacked with an in-house majority, the committee avoided any systematic review of programming, and concluded with a pat on its own back:

> PBS's procedures . . . have encouraged programs of high quality that reflect a wide range of information, opinion, and artistic expression and that satisfy accepted journalistic standards.

The fact that business would proceed as usual became quickly apparent. In the fall of 1989, WNET presented a 90-minute documentary about the Palestinian *intifada* entitled *Days of Rage*. It turned out to be a catalogue of horror stories about the Israeli occupation, featuring interviews with Palestinian moderates and Israeli extremists, and omitting any mention of Palestinian terrorism.

During the battle over *Days of Rage*, WNET was besieged by public protests and membership cancellations but held fast to its decision. Reflecting later on his role in airing the program, WNET vice president Robert Kotlowitz displayed an attitude that was both perverse and at the same time characteristic of that of other public-television officials:

> I thought the *intifada* program was a horror. It *was* a horror. And I wasn't happy with having it on the air. But I'm still happy that we made the decision to go with it.

It was, by any standard, an extraordinary admission for a professional journalist. One would be hard put to imagine, for example, a CBS executive first acknowledging a story's indefensibility and then claiming an achievement in running it.

IN TRYING to understand this attitude, as well as the generally leftist bias of PBS, it is necessary to recognize that the entire public-television community (and that includes its friends in Congress) operates out of loyalty to what insiders refer to as the "mission." Simply put, the mission is a mandate to give the public what commercial television, because it is "constrained by the commercial necessity of delivering mass audiences to advertisers," allegedly cannot provide. The words belong to the current president of PBS, Bruce Christensen, and are contemporary. But they could as well have been taken from the Carnegie Commission report of 25 years ago. The mission is what makes public television "public." It is its life principle and *raison d'être*. It is what justifies the hundreds of millions of government and privately contributed dollars necessary to keep the system going.

But the mission is also what provides a rationale

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under which extreme Left viewpoints have a presumptive claim on public air time. This is the rationale that justifies the indefensible propaganda of programs like *Days of Rage* and the promos for Communist guerrillas in Central America. It is the rationale under which a partisan journalist like Nina Totenberg, who was involved in the leak that nearly destroyed Clarence Thomas, could be assigned by PBS as its principal reporter and commentator on the hearings triggered by that very leak.

Just how much a part of the ethos of public television this attitude has become can be seen in a recent controversy involving Bill Moyers, who has been praised as a "national treasure" by the present PBS programming chief, Jennifer Lawson. Moyers had come under fire as the author of PBS's only two full-length documentaries on the Iran-*contra* affair, *The Secret Government* (1987) and *High Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1990). Critics (of whom I was one) questioned whether these programs met the standards of fairness and balance that public television was legally supposed to honor. Moyers's response was a tortured invocation of public television's mission:

> What deeper understanding of our role in the world could we have come to by praising Oliver North yet again, when we had already gotten five full days before Congress, with wall-to-wall coverage on network, cable, and public airwaves, to tell his side of the story? *In fact, it hardly seems consistent with "objectivity, balance, and fairness" that the other side of his story got only two 90-minute documentaries on public television.* [Emphasis added.]

For anyone not steeped in Moyers's own political mythology this was an eccentric view of what had taken place. North, of course, had not produced his own network documentary. He had been hauled before a congressional committee largely made up of political enemies who were bent on exposing him as a malefactor and on discrediting the administration in which he had served. Yet because he had turned the tables on them and emerged from his ordeal with a positive approval rating, Moyers blithely and blandly assumed that the commercial networks had been telling only North's "side of the story." Therefore the mission of public television was not to present a balance of views within its own schedule, as its enabling legislation required, but to attack North more successfully than the stagers of the hearings had managed to do.

Quite apart from its absurdity, Moyers's position reveals how out of date is the concept that originally inspired public television. For the fact that the Iran-*contra* hearings, which attempted to impugn the integrity and even the legitimacy of the Reagan presidency, were aired on all three networks, not to mention C-Span and CNN, means just the opposite of what Moyers seems to think it means. It means that public television can no longer position itself as the only channel on which anti-establishment views can be broadcast. Recognizing this occupation of its point on the spectrum, public television has sought a new space by positioning itself even more firmly on the Left.

There is also, perhaps, another factor at work here—bad conscience. This bad conscience stems, first, from PBS's increasing reliance on big corporations in its search for funds. Thus, between 1973 and 1978, corporate "underwriting" of public television went up nearly 500 percent. By the 1980's, corporate sponsorship accounted for almost as much of the public-television budget as its entire federal subsidy. Worse yet for the liberal conscience, the leaders in this trend, contributing more than half the total support, were big bad oil companies like Mobil, Exxon, and Gulf.

But even more significant is the degree to which, with the advent of cable, commercial stations have begun to compete directly with PBS. The Arts & Entertainment network (A&E) was started by the head of PBS's cultural programming, and its schedule—whether showing European movies, or serious drama, or biographies of historical figures—is comparable to anything PBS can offer. Another cable channel, Bravo, features drama from Aeschylus to O'Neill, film from Olivier to Buñuel, and music from Monteverdi to Messiaen. The Discovery channel now repeats the nature shows that made PBS's early career, while C-Span provides 'round-the-clock political interviews and discussions at the most serious level, including live sessions of Congress, and political conventions and meetings. The one PBS feature that these channels do not offer is the monotonous diet of left-wing politics.

But if left-wing politics is PBS's ill-conceived solution to its identity crisis, it is also in the last analysis the key to its financial unease. For as the country has become more conservative, PBS's radical posture has alienated a major part of public television's audience of supporters as well as its Republican constituency in Congress. Indeed, it is only because Congress has remained stubbornly Democratic against the conservative tide that public television is not in even deeper financial trouble. But the current situation is inherently unstable and will remain so as long as public television fails to live up to its statutory mandate by presenting a fair balance of views reflecting the broad interests of the population that is being taxed to help support it.

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Race, Lies & Democrats

Noemie Emery

A SEX crime—a black man, a white victim—and Willie Horton, the convict furloughed by Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, who on a weekend outing brutalized a couple in Maryland, entered the culture as a *cause célèbre*, as a key in the switch that in the 1988 presidential campaign turned a 19-point Dukakis lead in May into an 8-point lead for George Bush in November, and as an enduring symbol: of what, no one agrees. Democrats call it race-baiting, playing on prejudice. Republicans, from the President down, say the issue is not what Horton looked like but what Dukakis *did*. Along with the quota wars, the struggle over busing, racial tensions in cities and on university campuses, the Horton case occupies the ground where race crosses crime and other issues, a terrain of danger and immense complexity, where feelings are high, motives suspect, and meanings everywhere unclear.

At this juncture, oddities occur. Republicans court black achievers as possible candidates. Black "leaders" denounce them as enemy renegades. As Americans accept blacks as leaders and heroes—as governors, generals, justices, and (in at least two cases) as serious possible Presidents—the civil-rights movement tumbles from favor, its clout diminished, its agenda challenged. In the crossfire of argument over the Clarence Thomas nomination, it becomes apparent that race is entangled in a cluster of issues marginally connected to it, ranging in nature from interest to principle, with great emotive power of their own.

Did whites who fought busing hate black children? Or fear having their own children bused into neighborhoods they or their parents had escaped? Is "quota" a flashword because whites hate blacks? Fear losing a job or a lawsuit? Resent mandated preference in *anyone's* interest? Detest a value system that denigrates people, reducing them to members of a herd? Was the Horton case about a black criminal—or about a criminal who happened to be black?

If George Bush plays on these themes, what does that make him? A politician, raising questions of values and policy? Or a *haut*-Wasp George Wallace, playing on hate? Democrats, who claim they lost the 1988 election on a pitch to racial prejudice, and think they may have lost the White House indefinitely when they took on the burden of equity, join the civil-rights movement to call Bush a cynic, pandering to an electorate irredeemably racist, that hates blacks as blacks, and hates whites who help them, and that uses terms like "values"—and crime, welfare, and discipline—as code words for bias, for feelings better left unexpressed.

Is this true? Or is *race* now the code word, absorbing strains from other domestic issues, even more divisive, which the country as a whole abhors? Is race making social issues nastier? Or are social issues stopping progress in matters of race? In this question is the puzzle of domestic politics. Who is telling lies to whom?

THE Democrats' take on the Horton case has always been simple: Republicans magnified, and lied about, a minor incident. Dukakis was blameless. The driving force throughout was race.

This *is* simple. It is also wrong. Many states had furlough programs in which inmates facing release were permitted short-term outings, to ease them back into normal life. Only a few furloughed those serving life sentences, who were never programmed for release. Dukakis did not start the program, begun in 1972 by a Republican. But he backed it, endorsed it, defended it, and in 1976, vetoing a bill that would have changed it, he made it his own. After Horton's capture he still would not change it, refusing to release records which would show that Horton had a history of eleven in-prison violations, some of them involving drugs.

It was after the Lawrence (Mass.) *Eagle-Tribune* had run most of what would be 175 articles, had started a write-in campaign, and collected 57,000 signatures on a petition to put an anti-furlough referendum on the November 1988 ballot, that the Massachusetts legislature stepped in, preempting pressure with an amendment of its own. Dukakis

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signed this in March 1988 as he was closing in on the Democratic nomination, making it clear he was signing under protest, having refused in the meantime to answer or acknowledge critics, or meet Horton's victims, the couple Horton had attacked in Maryland and the sister of the young man Horton killed. The *Eagle-Tribune* was about to win a Pulitzer Prize, and the *Reader's Digest* was preparing an article for its July issue that would shred the governor, when Bush's campaign strategist, Lee Atwater, handed an aide a 3″ x 5″ index card, returned later with notes about the furlough and related issues, including Dukakis's hostility to defense programs and his veto of a bill instructing public-school teachers to start the day by leading students in the Pledge of Allegiance.

In late May, this material was tested on Reagan Democrats planning to return to their old party. Republicans knew the furlough story would resonate, but were stunned by its power: minutes after having heard it, half of every focus group had turned. Early in June, Bush started to mention it. In late June, Atwater realized it had started to define the enemy. He did not realize he had struck platinum until the July 4 holiday, at a bikers' rally, when a (black) woman at a table near his discussed the *Digest* article herself.

The issue was not central to national governance, and was easy for critics to dismiss. It mattered because it showed Dukakis in a pattern voters found incredible, and one he never bothered to explain. As the Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg noted in an intra-campaign memo, "Voters are looking for some way of understanding Dukakis's position, . . . in the absence of an explanation, they are proceeding to imagine the worst. We have to give voters some way of understanding or rationalizing the furloughs, so they can achieve closure, and move on." Dukakis said nothing—not to the voters, and not to the victims who held him responsible and added to their brief of bad judgment an incredible indifference to their fate.

"Dukakis would later call [it] a 'terrible tragedy,' but he would never apologize," writes Roger Simon in *Roadshow*. "The Dukakis campaign said there was no reason for the governor to apologize for something that was not his fault." Horton's victims then dropped the *coup de grâce* upon the governor, filming commercials for the Bush campaign and going on a speaking tour.

The issue worked because it touched a picture of Dukakis as governor—and of his party in the past. For years, that party had seemed weak and dissonant, estranged from many of its old constituents, uninterested in defending them, either abroad, vis-à-vis a foreign power, or in their streets and neighborhoods at home. Once the guardian of order, it shunned the very word. Once mainstream, with roots in mass culture, it identified with those who saw the culture as oppressive and corrupt. Alienation was glorified, sometimes beyond reason, valid theories carried to extremes. Concern for rights became contempt for community. Tolerance for deviants became disdain for the norm. Liberals saw criminals as rebels or victims, underdogs facing the weight of state power. They did not sense how much common people saw *themselves* as threatened, by a predator class and an indifferent system in which victims were abandoned or ignored.

In 1972, the social issue surfaced in national politics. Democrats, who had swept the country in 1964, and in 1968 almost pulled even despite a splintered party and a weak candidate, now took one state and the District of Columbia. After 1972, they attempted to finesse the issue by running candidates whose credentials varied but who in the course of campaigning invariably revealed themselves as weak: weak in person, weak on defense, weak in controlling the claims of client groups. The Dukakis campaign was framed to make him appear moderate and strong: moderate compared to Jesse Jackson, his late-term rival, strong compared to Bush, then painted as an effete patrician and as weak himself. Dukakis's lead was built on this image, which pushed him 19 points ahead by spring. In May, Atwater knew he had to shatter it. In June, he had the hammer in his hands.

The charm of the case was that it tripped all the wires, the bill of divorce between Middle America and the national Democrats, in effect for over sixteen years. Dukakis was a liberal, new-style, whose heart bled in all the wrong places. He put abstract rights above public safety, the interests of criminals over those they terrorized. He liked social plans that looked good on paper, ignoring consequences when they failed. He was indifferent to those who deserved his protection: the tax-paying, law-abiding, middle class. (Bush's media consultant, Roger Ailes, who knew the damage even a delayed gesture would do to the campaign he was crafting, lived in terror that Dukakis would at last apologize for the furlough—a step the Democrats debated endlessly but could not bring themselves to take. One reason was that Dukakis still thought himself blameless. Another was that he might reveal his reason for favoring furloughs for those serving life sentences: he intended to pardon them, as he had already pardoned 28.)

For all the Democrats' talk of deception and image-mongering, the fact remains that throughout his career everything Dukakis said or did in public only reinforced the impression that in matters of crime and punishment he saw life through the eyes of the defense—or at least of the defense attorney—not the victim, or the state. The defining moment, which validated the campaign against him, came in the second debate with Bush,

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when the TV journalist Bernard Shaw hypothetically cast *him* as a victim of violence, and Dukakis leaped reflexively to the side of the accused. Dukakis was described later in books and articles as "an emotional minimalist," "pathetically incapable of relating to others," and "oblivious to undercurrents . . . complicated, unspoken, but very real sensitivities . . . the stuff of which all politics is made." Whether he did not share, or simply could not voice, the rage felt by most people at the impact of violence, he never expressed it, and when Shaw gave him a chance to do so, he turned the question back against himself. Whatever he might have said or felt in private, his concern in public was always for criminals. No impression could have hurt him more.

The Dukakis campaign had been posed as counter-McGovern, an attempt to re-center the party and reclaim its lost millions—based on the fact that he was, after all, a fiscal moderate and, unlike the party's 1984 candidate Walter Mondale, unconnected to the noisy interest groups. But on two themes—defense, and crime and punishment—he was a McGovern liberal, and it was on these that he was destroyed. Both concerned the issue known as use-of-force: social force, employed by government, to punish or deter aggression, abroad or in domestic matters. This is what most people want of government. It is what Democrats find very hard to do.

The social issue is a disaster for the Democrats, who have now lost the Supreme Court into the next century and the White House in five of six starts. For the civil-rights movement, it has been a catastrophe, slicing its ties to the American heartland, shrinking it from a crusade to a marginal enterprise, linking it by association to ideas Americans dislike: crime without punishment, welfare without work, and quotas, or the rating of people by type rather than talent. The movement cannot shake its association with quotas since it seems to promote them. Neither can Democrats after the rules adopted by their 1971 reform commission, and after nominating Geraldine Ferraro for the vice presidency in 1984.

Do racists type blacks as lazy or criminal? So do liberals, who by constantly linking black rights to the interests of deviants, create and reinforce the pairing between minorities and crime. Blacks are more likely than whites to be criminals. They are also more likely to be *victims,* and are increasingly likely to work for the law. Would the widow of a black policeman mind the chance to tell a courtroom what violence has brought into her life?

The Gulf War was a gift to the civil-rights movement, a chance to bond with the heartland on shared pride, power, and competence, to prove that affirmative action done properly—expanding the pool, promoting on merit—can work very, very well. Did the movement push black soldiers as heroes and models? Stress that a military success had been won by an integrated armed service? Proclaim that the military, with a far higher percentage of blacks than the general populace, works better than many civilian businesses, for which it might serve as a model? All this was said—by white conservatives. The civil-rights movement went public with support for HR1, an employment bill vulnerable to the quota charge, and with attacks on Clarence Thomas, whose life story refutes negative imaging. Shunning success and its symbols, the movement sets itself counter to national values, thereby courting resistance. Linking itself to disorder and impotence, it ensures resistance will appear.

Increasingly, the movement has problems with blacks who win power. They win power as people the movement has been programmed to dislike. The parallel is with feminists, who despised Margaret Thatcher, an individualist quick to use power in the national interest. That is why she became prime minister. Twins in spirit, the civil-rights and feminist movements leach values into the national Democratic party that have hastened its precipitous decline. They incline toward groupthink, seeking redemption by number. They urge social tinkering for prearranged outcomes. They are pacifist, opposing force in all settings. Feminists see power as mere boyish nonsense. Movement people misread their own experience, thinking that the nonviolence that worked in America, with a strong government, strong Presidents, and strong public input, would work in the world, where there is no National Guard and no government, and nothing at all to check abusive power—except power of another sort.

The message—that power is evil, and that a flawed society has no values it can legitimately impose on anyone—devastated the Democrats, already reeling from Vietnam and their guilt about it, and preconditioned to retreat. The party softened, becoming neutered, then feminized, losing power both in platforms and in candidates. On domestic issues, it fell back on nurturing (becoming, in Christopher Matthews's term, the "mommy" party), withdrawing to the sickroom and nursery, frightened of the noises in the street. In foreign affairs it no longer even pretends to have a policy. Only ten Senate Democrats voted to support the use of force in the Persian Gulf. Because of this, the party views the next election with terror. If it loses, it will, of course, blame race.

Is race the killer, the source of the Democrats' malaise? They say so. But John F. Kennedy sent troops into Southern states, and died a national hero. Lyndon Johnson signed two massive rights bills and in between won a

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landslide, leaving his rival—a backlash candidate who ran on the code words "states' rights" and "law and order"—with a shattered party and six Southern states. The Democrats did not lose until 1968, when they split over the war and culture. They did not lose big until 1972, when they assumed the burden of the social issue, whose dead hand grips them still.

What happens to blacks (or liberals) who shed the matrix, the weave of weakness/quotas/crime? General Colin ("cut it off and kill it") Powell has no problems with power. Governor Douglas Wilder of Virginia said "no new taxes," and wrapped himself in the flag. Gary Franks, running in a white Connecticut district, became the first black Republican in the House since Reconstruction, defeating a white liberal on values and defense.

No candidate was more linked to blacks than Jimmy Carter, backed by a dozen visible black leaders, blessed on national television by the father of Martin Luther King. In 1976 he won as a social conservative and ex-career officer, a protégé of Admiral Rickover—naval icon, tough nut. (In 1980 he lost as a wimp who could not keep order, in his party or the Persian Gulf.) John Kennedy appealed to snobs, and to men in bars and factories. Johnson took votes in ghettos—and white ethnic neighborhoods. No one thought of them as in the "mommy" party. They would not have looked peculiar in a tank.

What would have happened were Willie Horton white, or a black who savaged black victims, or a white thug who brutalized an appealing black couple, no one can know. But the focus groups that turned on Dukakis *did not know* Horton's color. Bush never mentioned it. In the *Reader's Digest* article, whose impact is shattering, it is nowhere mentioned or implied. It was not until September that a mug shot was slipped onto cable television, whence it was picked up by the national and network news. By this time, Dukakis had long since started to decline.

Televised, Horton's face is pale against the hair around it. It is easy to see that he looks menacing; it is less obvious that he is black. As the British journalist Matthew Ridley writes in a book not kind to the Republicans, most Americans did not know Horton's race until the issue crested, and then only because the Democrats complained. Did Bush play the bias issue, reaching out to racial fears? No. He played the cracks around the social issue, careless of the race themes entwined in it, guilty of the effort not to heal. But the Democrats, trying to stifle him, tried to suppress a critique of their own failures, their weak candidates, their flawed ideas. Theirs is a feel-good claim, that lets them rationalize and live with failure. Civil rights is Good. If they lose while defending it, they are good too. Too good for the country. Too good for this world.

THE Democratic party and the civil-rights movement have squandered the capital amassed through the mid-1960's, slipping from the center to the fringe of power, making "liberal," once the term of choice of the American majority, an expression of derision and contempt. The civil-rights movement will not recoup until it reclaims consensus, separating integration, which should be a national purpose, from the social agenda, which is narrow, rigid—and disliked. The party will not recoup until it regains its senses, taking its cues from John, not Ted, Kennedy, the latter of whom, in the Gulf War debate, recalled the words of their father at Munich: "I should like to ask you if you know of a dispute or controversy existing in the world which is worth the life of your son, or of anyone else's son."

To recoup, the party must revert to the *status quo ante* (*ante* about 1967), and let go of three lies: that by doing so they betray their heritage; that they betray the weak, and their own historic mission; that they lose because of bias, not through errors of their own. These thoughts comfort them. They are not true.

The litmus-test issues the Democrats have lost on are not part of their proper heritage. They stem from McGovern, not Truman or Roosevelt, from the Blue Period, not the Golden Age. What did Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy think of the death penalty, quotas, or late-term abortion? What did they think about force? Roosevelt sought war, and waged it. Truman dropped two atomic bombs and defended Korea. Kennedy risked war over Cuba, and bought therein the power to talk peace. This historically is how peace is purchased. Republicans, the new interventionists, learned this from Democrats—at the same time the Democrats forgot.

Nor will the Democrats betray their mission, the integration of outsiders into the greater community, the pulling into the mainstream of the marginal strivers, immigrants, minorities, the working poor. This mission has already been compromised. The caucuses that swarmed over the party in the 1972 election not only drove out the middle, but subjugated the needs of the poor to their own arcane agendas, their "lifestyles issues," their sense of grievance and deferred entitlement, their endless escalation of demands. Slicing society into factions and subgroups, battening on the condition of victimhood, fighting each other for attention and recompense, they broke the sense of community that makes progress possible. Ensuring by their presence that the party will stay out of power, they have banished the poor from the true source of recompense: a national government run by a President whom the poor have helped to elect. They condemn the needy to ongoing impotence. If this is service, it is strange.

The last lie is the one that Horton's color has

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let them keep telling: that they lose, not because of weakness, but because they are "progressive" on race. Are the refinements they push now more progressive in their time and place than what Johnson and Kennedy accomplished? Why did this not break *them* as leaders? Why were the peak years of rights agitation also the peak years of the Democrats' power? Why did they win most when associated with racial change?

Historically, the Democrats have not lost on race. They have won on it: when it has been presented as a national purpose, as a matter of fairness to individual people, when it has stood as an issue on its own. It stood on its own in the 1964 election. Democrats won. By 1968, the social issue intruded. They lost, narrowly. It coopted them in the 1972 election, when they entered the Dark Tunnel, from which they still struggle to emerge.

The damage done to everyone by the social issue is a matter of record and regret. Bitterly dividing whites through two decades, it is now dividing blacks as well. It has shattered the Democrats as a national party, exempted the presidency from contest and accountability, and given Republicans a seemingly permanent key to power—with a nasty little twist: while the social issue is still mixed up with bias, anyone addressing it, however unwillingly, ratchets up the tensions over race. Nixon did not care. Reagan did not notice. Bush notices, and cares, but is politically too indebted to the social issue to pull back. His presidency has in some way been tarnished by it—cut off from one aspect of national leadership. The President, not guilty as charged, is not innocent, either. The civil-rights movement has become its own worst enemy. The Democrats are lying to themselves.

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A Gallery of Former Jews

Judith Laikin Elkin

LATIN AMERICAN societies, which embrace individual Jews with open arms, are freighted with hostility toward the Jewish people. While flesh-and-blood Jews are welcomed into Christian bosoms with enthusiasm, Judaism in the abstract is anathema, an outdated creed discredited by the message of Christ. The enigma of Jewish life in Latin America is that Christians accept into their marital beds persons whom they would not admit to their clubs.

Within a generation of arrival in Latin America, intermarriage was making heavy inroads into the numbers of Jews. Rabbis being less tolerant than priests when it comes to conversion, intermarriage became a one-way street down which Jews and their children disappeared; only sustained immigration kept an identifiable Jewish presence going at all. Everywhere that immigration ceased, Jewish population size dropped, as individual Jews chose to cease being Jewish—by merging into the warm sea of family relationships, by passing themselves off as something else, by acceding to the Latin ethos and distancing themselves from the Jewish community. Today, Jews with a strong sense of identity cluster in highly visible institutions that thrum with Jewish activity, leaving tourists with the impression of a thriving communal life; meanwhile, thousands of other Jews slip out the back, hop on the bus, get themselves free.

"Anti-Semitism is not the problem: assimilation is." All over Latin America, Jewish community leaders sing this threnody. They downgrade the overturned tombstones, the graffiti painted on synagogue walls. Such acts, they correctly point out, occur all over the world. But they seldom proceed to identify the real source of trouble, namely, a political and social climate that gives permission for these acts to occur. Jewish communal leaders follow a strategy of special pleading: police protection for Jewish buildings, suppression of anti-Jewish publications, etc. They win an occasional skirmish, but the strategy has been ineffectual in changing the fact that there is widespread toleration for intolerance when it comes to Jews.

At the heart of Latin anti-Semitism is the demand for *total* assimilation. This theme emerges again and again through the hundreds of life stories of Latin American Jews which I have collected and a few of which are presented here with names and situations disguised.

2.

HARD by the northern reaches of Argentina and far from the Bolivian plateau lies the city of Tarija. Its citizens boast of their fair skin, clean blood, and limpid Castilian, all of which distinguish them from their darkling compatriots of the *altiplano*. Once upon a time, a great university was located not far from here, at Chuquisaca. But appalling isolation settled down upon the sons and daughters of the conquistadors after the empire collapsed, leaving only memories of colonial glory to console them. All the *tarijanos* had left to them was their pride of ancestry.

Into this proud, provincial town on a cold, clear morning in 1889 walked a *turco*, one of those indefinably foreign men who spoke with an accent and never went to church. He led a donkey hung with pots and pans, tablecloths and petticoats, knives and forks and spoons and missals, pictures of saints, and books from Buenos Aires. This *buhonero*, this peddler, walked the length of Argentina every year, from the coast to the foothills of the Andes, selling his load of consumer goods and collecting his accounts in towns like Tarija that lived beyond the world of factories and department stores. He spent his days trudging the old silver smugglers' trail, and nights huddled against his donkey on barren mountainsides powdered with snow, undergoing trials and humiliations too numerous to remember, in order to bring his gewgaws to landlocked towns forgotten by their own national governments, which never got around to building proper roads.

He was able to make a living in this way because established merchants in the towns dealt only in *efectivo*, as the Spanish call ready cash, and for good reason; it is the only thing that has any effect.

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The *buhonero*, on the other hand, let his customers have the goods they wanted with very little *efectivo*—and on the first payment. The word of housewives, useless at the store or the bank, was good enough for him. The *buhonero* made a 100-percent profit on the items he sold, although most of what he sold cost only a few pesos, and he had to wait a long time to collect his accounts. He did not make a fortune; but it was enough to keep him marching up and down the plains and foothills between Buenos Aires and Tarija.

As a man of the world, the *turco* enjoyed some status in the town. The lack of other company even led some families—not those with the oldest names, of course—to drop their standards sufficiently to invite him to dinner. For in addition to more tangible commodities, the *buhonero* brought news of the big city, the latest word on ladies' fashions and military coups (which are only men's fashions), and even an occasional novel, forbidden by the priest but passed from hand to hand in a delicious conspiracy of the literate but bookless female population. Of course, being a *turco*, the man was clearly of no social standing, but he undeniably had a certain charm.

And so this particular *turco*, who kept his accounts in Yiddish and was no Turk at all but a Jew from the Russian Pale of Settlement, wooed and won a maid of Tarija, married her in church, settled in town, and had two daughters, who were baptized and took their first communion together with their classmates at the parish school. As a married man, he opened a real store, "La Bonaerense," where he continued selling ordinary articles of household use that the speakers of pure Castilian disdained to sell, and where he went on extending credit to housewives without collateral.

The *turco* continued to be referred to as a *turco* by the people of the town, but as time passed, he was accepted well enough, especially as his wife and daughters performed their religious obligations meticulously. He continued traveling to earn his living, sometimes being absent a month or more but always returning with tales of the big city and pockets full of presents for his wife and daughters. In this way, he supported his family in respectable style until the day he left on a trip and never came back.

The *turco*'s wife, not knowing whether she was widowed or abandoned, assumed the proprietorship of the store and went on raising her daughters to be as respectable, Catholic, and submissive as herself. In time, she was able to arrange good marriages for them, the elder to a lawyer, the younger to an architect. They attended church regularly, observed the fasts and saints' days, and who knows whether they ever dwelled on the mystery of their *turco* father who had left home one day and never returned.

Twenty years after her husband's disappearance, the maid of Tarija, her black hair long since turned white, received a letter from a lawyer in Buenos Aires informing her of the *turco*'s recent death. There was a bequest. In the course of executing the legal documents necessary for collecting her inheritance, the widow discovered she had never been legally married. There had been another, earlier, family, a Jewish one, also with two daughters, living in Buenos Aires, who received the bulk of the estate. With the money she received she bought mourning clothes for herself and her daughters and paid for a mass for her late husband; she put the rest toward dowries for their grandchildren.

* * *

RAQUEL WAS BORN and raised in Tres Arboles, the Jewish agricultural colony near Montevideo. It was an impoverished childhood, but in the way of the children of the poor, she was unaware of that fact. Grade school was the only education the colony afforded, but that was sufficient for a farm girl, particularly one as pretty as Raquel, who was bound to find a husband right away. Everyone thought Raquel a beauty, except her parents, who were not pleased: her blonde hair, blue eyes, and pushed-up nose were to them a reminder of the pogroms in their native Poland.

As a fifteenth-birthday present, her parents took Raquel to the Balfour Ball in Montevideo, where she met and fell in love with Miguel, who was twenty-one. Handsome, lively, the son of wealthy parents, top student at the law faculty, Miguel was obviously headed for a brilliant career, at least as brilliant as any Jew could achieve in Uruguay, still an unknown continent to these recent immigrants. So brilliant a prospect was he, in fact, that both families agreed he was far above marriage to a little farm girl with unsettlingly Gentile looks. Miguel and Raquel continued to see one another for three years, but in the end, their families refused to consent to their marriage.

So Raquel's parents dragged her back, crying, to Tres Arboles, where she swore that, if she could not have Miguel, she would never marry any Jew. She turned down every eligible man in Tres Arboles, and during a family visit to Montevideo a year later, during which Miguel's own marriage took place to a more suitable young woman, she refused to leave the house at all. Raquel retreated into herself, went in and out of her parents' home like a shadow, showed no interest in marriage, and gave short shrift to any man who came courting—a dwindling number in any event. She moved to Montevideo, became an interior decorator, and when her parents died, invested the proceeds from the sale of their farm in a furniture store. Miguel, in the fullness of time, became a justice of the high court, fulfilling the immigrants' dream.

At the age of thirty-five, Raquel married a widower of fifty, a Catholic of course, and to everyone's surprise produced a child, Berta. This being Montevideo, it was possible to raise Berta

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without religion. Such a thing could not have happened in Tarija or in Tres Arboles; but Montevideo was a cosmopolitan city, secular to the core.

Raquel's relatives observed the Jewish mourners' rites when she married; her husband's family never received her. The child's birth went unacknowledged. Educated in the public schools, Berta performed brilliantly and won a scholarship that enabled her to attend college in the United States, where she became my student. She studied history and political science, intending to enter the Uruguayan diplomatic service.

"Tell Berta not to come home," Raquel said to me. We were sitting in the storeroom of Raquel's shop, now not so much an interior-decorating salon as a warehouse for secondhand furniture. The death of her husband had left Raquel entirely alone. Her comfortable home in a genteel residential neighborhood had been alienated by the peculiar property laws of the country. Uruguay, its economy destroyed by the military dictatorship, had slid down the tubes. Any *uruguayo* who could, had abandoned the country. Thousands were working across the river in Argentina, driving cabs or cleaning hotel rooms.

The storeroom where Raquel lived had one electric light bulb dangling from a cord from the high ceiling, which was more depressing than no light at all. She prepared dinner for me, with many apologies, on a kerosene stove beside her bed. The only heat in the room was generated by the bottle of wine I had brought. Raquel was suffering the embarrassment that only a middle-class person can feel when reduced to shabbiness. I had nothing to offer her. Berta had been her hope, a chance to vindicate old mistakes and might-have-beens. And now she knew that the only way to save Berta was to give her up. "Tell Berta not to come home," she repeated at the end of the evening. "She must make her life elsewhere."

At that time, I had known Berta for three years; she had visited in my home, knew that I was Jewish, and had never mentioned that she herself was Jewish. Either she did not know, or it was totally irrelevant to her.

* * *

IN THE LAST quarter of the 19th century, a group of 100 or so Jews migrated from Lodz to Córdoba in Argentina, just in time to succumb to the epidemic of yellow fever that decimated the city's population. One of the few immigrants to survive was a girl of ten named Blume. When her parents died, a kindly neighbor took her in and raised her together with her own children. When Blume, now renamed Flora, was sixteen, a local businessman came to call, sitting with the girl in her foster mother's living room with its overstuffed Victorian furniture and its pictures of ancestors and saints hung high on the walls. Flora was pleased to have a suitor, happy that a respectable man would be interested in her, an orphan, a girl who could bring no advantages to a marriage. She liked his manner of speaking to her, the way in which he handed her down the front steps and into the carriage which he hired to take her on Sunday drives. But one thing troubled her.

"I know I am Jewish," she told her foster mother, "and I think I remember that I am only supposed to marry another Jew."

"My dear," said her foster mother, "you are probably correct in what you remember. But where will you find a Jewish man to marry you? It appears they have all died. If you love Sr. Esquivel, it surely cannot be wrong to marry him."

The wedding took place in church, after the bride had been instructed and taken her first communion. Her descendants, all of whom are Catholic, are fond of telling stories about their Jewish grandmother, who continued to light candles on Friday night until the week she died.

* * *

JOHANNES WAS BORN in Vienna, the only son of physicians who had long since liberated themselves from Jewish tradition. In the concentration camp near Bayonne where he was incarcerated by the Vichy government because he was a Jew, he was registered as John by the representative who came from New York on behalf of the Dominican Republic Resettlement Association (DORSA). A healthy young man of twenty, judged to be capable of manual labor, he was extracted from the camp and shipped to the Dominican Republic, where, on land seized from a political opponent, the dictator Trujillo was allowing refugee Jews to be resettled in a gesture calculated to win the favor of the American President. So in a matter of months, John was liberated from slavery and death, transported to a tropical island, and told to become a farmer.

There were some 500 other "farmers" at Sosua with him, mostly young men like himself. They had little in common save their newly-forged perception of themselves as Jews and their complete ignorance of agriculture. They would not have made it at all but for the help of their Dominican neighbors, who showed them how and when to plant, how to manage horses, what to do when the ants marched across their fields, and how to pass the lonely nights. Local women gradually began to fill the gap left by DORSA, which had selected mostly men for its controlled experiment. The jealousies and quarrels that resulted from the imbalance of the sexes came close to breaking up the colony.

Johannes was one who prospered at Sosua by starting up a dairy farm. His isolated life became more bearable when he formed a household with

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a young Dominican woman who used to come selling fresh vegetables. Some colonists frowned on these informal unions, seeing them as a way of "going native"; but Inez's lively eyes and incessant chatter brightened John's life and gave him an interest in his own future. After the birth of their son, he married her. She called her husband Juan, their son, Juanito; the child could not be Jewish because his mother was not Jewish, and how could Juan not attend his own son's baptism? Later, when other children were born to the couple and Juan was totally engaged with the dairy, he felt that the education of the children was better left to their mother.

Although he paid little attention to Jewish observance, there was one holiday to which Juan felt an attachment. Every year he recalled his own emergence from slavery by celebrating Passover. Together with the other colonists, he organized a seder, where the products they had created with their own labor, and which had never been produced on the island before—beef and ham and sausage, pasteurized milk, butter, and cheese of every kind—were served. Juan read the Haggadah as though it applied directly to himself; that was a day for remembering the camp at Bayonne and the way his father and mother had urged him to seize this chance at life, even if it meant they would never see one another again. Inez, who could only guess at what was in Juan's mind, but who knew that her Lord had been betrayed at the Passover meal, joined in the songs.

But the highlight of the year for them both was Christmas. It was then that the family drove into Santo Domingo for midnight mass at the great Cathedral where Christopher Columbus may or may not lie entombed. The chanting of the priests, the swelling of the organ and the enchanting music, the incense, moved them deeply, calling forth feelings that lay dormant the rest of the year in Sosua. On that night, Inez felt reconciled to her Lord, who had himself been a Jew. On that night, Johannes pulled together the broken fragments of his life, remembering his childhood in Vienna.

* * *

THE DEPORTATION began at five in the morning, when all the Jews in Helena's town in Hungary were ordered to report to the railway station. Crowded together in the uncertain light, people milled about as though drunk, or stood and stared with unseeing eyes. As the soldiers pressed forward, herding people into a tighter and tighter knot, her mother whispered to her, "You are small. Crawl between the soldiers' legs and run away and hide." And that is what Helena did, running pell-mell up the familiar streets, back to her home which had already been looted down to the floorboards, and hiding in the basement. Hunger drove her out after two days, and she went next door, to where she had so often gone before, to Mrs. Nagy's. Until two days before, a million years ago, Helena and Susu Nagy had been playmates.

Opening the door, Mrs. Nagy seemed surprised to see her. "My, my," she said, and let her in and sent her to bathe and then sat her down at the supper table with the family. Susu, sitting next to Helena, said nothing, did nothing to show that she had ever seen her before. It was as though Helena had become invisible, vanished together with her family. Mrs. Nagy ladled a bowl of soup for Helena from Helena's mother's soup tureen. That night, Helena slept in the same bed with Susu. Her friend still said nothing to her, but just before falling asleep, she gave Helena her necklace that had a crucifix on it. In the morning, Helena started walking to Palestine. She was eight years old.

How Helena reached Palestine is a story for another time. In brief, she met up with a group of children in the same circumstances as herself and who were also headed there, and they walked and carried one another to the Promised Land.

Helena was placed on a kibbutz where she recovered her health and began to grow again. She learned Hebrew with the facility of the young and recovered the merry spirit that had been born with her in Hungary. She did not mind the hard work of the kitchen, and in any group of dancers she was always at the center, singing off key with abandon, her hair black as the tents of Kedar swinging out behind her in a thick braid, sparks shooting from her black eyes.

Once, when she was seventeen, Helena's class got a day's vacation in Jerusalem. The class voted for soccer in the park, followed by a trip to an ice-cream parlor. But Helena sneaked away on her own, wanting to visit the traditional sites. It was Sunday, and the only tours being offered were to the Christian holy places; she signed up for one of these, paying with her ice-cream money. That was how she met her Mexican.

Maximiliano was thirty-four and recently freed by annulment from a marriage that had begun to bore him. He was intrigued by the beautiful little girl from the kibbutz with the merry black eyes, hair rough as a goat's pelt, and luscious white skin. She was taken by the charm and sophistication of this man who reminded her of the suave army officers she used to see riding through Pest, so much more interesting than the plainspoken boys of the kibbutz. Maximiliano besieged and won her. As there was no way a Christian and a Jew could marry in Israel, they flew to Cyprus. After the brief ceremony, he took her back to Mexico where, after two years of spoiling her and displaying her like a favorite toy to his friends, and six months after the birth of their daughter Mariela, Maximiliano acquired, by the usual means, an annulment of their marriage.

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Having survived the drama of the first two decades of her life, Helena decided to survive the rest. In the little cottage that Maximiliano let her keep, she painted the walls yellow and hung the rafters with Mexican crafts, and reconstructed her life and that of her daughter, whom she renamed Ariela in memory of the distant days on the kibbutz. A born storyteller, she wove the stuff of her many lives into short stories and poems, achieving some reputation as a writer and poet. She wrote her way into a circle of artists and intellectuals attached more or less to the university, a bohemian circle of Jews and non-Jews who could not have cared less about religious affiliation. Yet, in some curious way, Helena did.

Neither mother nor daughter had ever been acknowledged by Maximiliano's family. Perhaps, for all she knew, they did not consider her to have been married to their son; a family such as his might regard him as still married to his first wife. Perhaps they regarded Helena as their son's *amante*, a necessary ornament for a young man wanting to make his way in society, but not a person you invite into your home. If she had had a child, that was due to carelessness on her part, or an effort to entrap him. How characteristically generous of Maximiliano to have let her keep the cottage!

In view of her marriage to a Mexican, Helena had lived apart from other Jews. Now, she decided to approach the community in order to bring her daughter up as a Jew. Neither the Orthodox nor the Conservative synagogue would have this anomalous pair, so she joined the Reform temple although it felt strange to her. After enrolling Ariela in the temple Sunday school, Helena returned to her cottage that seemed to reflect a life lived entirely in sunshine. Lying on her couch, which she had covered with a handwoven throw from San Pedro Sula, under the cheery straw baskets hanging from the ceiling and filled with growing plants, within the yellow walls that trapped the sunshine and repelled the gloom, she fell asleep. She dreamed that she was back in Hungary, and lived again the feelings of dread and fear that had filled her eight-year-old heart as she ran, ran away from her parents whom she would never see again in her life, and hid in the darkest corner of the darkest space in their looted home. But this time, in her dream she had placed her daughter on that railway platform from which she herself had escaped, and the train was entering the station.

* * *

IT HAPPENED THAT, in the capital of a Central American country, let us say San Salvador, a Catholic woman fell in love with and became engaged to an Israeli businessman who had established an import-export business in the city. Like most Israelis, he was a secular person who had never set foot in a synagogue. But anticipating the problems they would face if they continued to profess different religions, he decided that his fiancée should convert to Judaism. She, for her part, was a religious person, and taking her future husband for God, agreed to accept his religion. So the prospective groom sent his bride to Israel where, over the course of two very trying years, the young woman was accepted for conversion to Judaism according to religious law. Thereafter they flew from their respective hemispheres to London where they were married by an Orthodox rabbi. Directly after the wedding, they returned to Salvador.

There, the bride was disowned by her parents and snubbed by her friends, who believed she had sold her soul to the devil for a mess of pottage: everyone knew that Jews had secret ways of enriching themselves. She was not unprepared for this eventuality, and took refuge in her faith. She who had been a faithful Catholic now became a faithful Jew, regarding religious observance as the essence of her commitment. She attended services religiously—but without her husband, who had complied with only one of the 613 commandments required of a Jew, namely, that he be circumcised. Unaccompanied by a man, she was treated as though she were a widow or a Gentile woman, a *shikseh*. "*Shikseh*" in fact was how she was known by the Jews of the city, who vacillated between patronizing her for her earlier heathen condition and despising her for her religiosity. Anyway, social life here revolved totally around the Jewish sports club. So when the couple's application for membership was rejected, they left the country and settled in Belize, where there are no Jews.

* * *

"JUSTICE, JUSTICE shalt thou pursue," read the note that Ricardo left for his parents when he joined the guerrillas. He was nineteen, and for the next seven years his family did not know whether he was alive or dead.

Like many Jewish children, Ricardo had been sent to a Jewish primary school, where his teachers delivered the message, "Be a Jew." He absorbed a little Hebrew, but did not make it through to bar mitzvah—there was no rabbi around at the time, and his parents did not care that much. When he was of high-school age and entered a *colegio*, his parents changed the message to, "Be a success." He was a good student, not brilliant but obedient and polite. A somewhat lonely boy, he bought a dog whom he named *Javer* (Hebrew for friend). In addition to the dog, the boy's other passion was the United Nations (somewhat confused in his mind with world government). When in 1975 the General Assembly decreed that Zionism equaled racism, his heart hardened against his parents.

"Why do you give money to Israel?" he de-

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manded of his parents, who were lifelong Zionists. "Don't you see that your attitude is racist?"

"Look," said his father, who had long ago accepted the Argentine view that Jews are a race, "if we don't care for our own, who will? Look what happened during the war, when no one cared what happened to Jews. Israel is a place where any Jew can go, at any time, and they have to take him in."

"But it's racist to be concerned only with Jews! What about oppressed blacks in South Africa, the Negroes in the United States, the *indios* of Bolivia?"

"It's not that we are not concerned with those other people, but they are not *our* people. We are more concerned for *our* people."

"Well, why don't you go to Israel, then, if those are 'your people?'" the boy asked.

To this, the parents had no ready reply. By any objective standard, they were not very Jewish. They did not attend synagogue except to recite memorial prayers for their close relatives, they worked on the Sabbath, they remembered only a little Yiddish, which they could not read, and had no Hebrew at all. If they *felt* Jewish, it was mostly because, being Jewish, they could not feel entirely Argentine. Being Argentine had to do with the Catholic Church and tango and having a brother-in-law who was an army officer; as marginally Jewish as they might be, they could never feel Catholic.

As for their Zionism, that was of a rather lukewarm nature as well. Not being wholly accepted as Argentines left a void in their lives that was filled by the distant dream of Zion. As with any dream, it had only a metaphoric relation to reality, symbolized by an annual monetary contribution. Could they move there? Well, they had already made one big move in their lives—from the agricultural colonies, where they could not make a living, to the city, where they earned enough from their shoe store to have an apartment of their own and some left over for an annual vacation at Viña del Mar. They told Ricardo not to talk back to them, and they continued contributing money to Israel.

Meanwhile, Ricardo graduated from *colegio* and was admitted to the University of Buenos Aires. Suddenly, he was in an exciting world of ideals and counter-ideals, deals and counter-deals. For the first time in his life, he made friends his own age. The faculty of sociology, where he enrolled, was boiling with ideas for saving the country—*nuestro país*, so rich and yet so poor!—to feed the starving, house the homeless, increase employment, and generally restore justice to the land. Best of all, these ideas related to the Argentine reality, not to some mythic country Ricardo had never seen. It was at the university that he learned that he could not be both a Jew and an Argentine, because Jews were Zionists and committed to a foreign country. Jews, they said, go to Israel! If you are Argentine, stay here with us and fight for our country. *Nuestro país!* As Zionism was all Ricardo knew about being a Jew, and as he wanted desperately to be accepted as an Argentine, he quit considering himself a Jew.

The political repression in Argentina began in his sophomore year with the disappearance of the faculty of the college of sociology. He heard but could not confirm that numerous psychologists, psychoanalysts, social workers, and others suspected of subverting Christian family life had likewise disappeared. There were rumors of labor-union leaders and priests and entire classes of high-school students being dragged off to an unknown fate. The air of emergency and threat was sustained by the press, which, severely controlled by the government, daily reported acts of left-wing terrorism, assassinations of judges and other officials, and armed confrontations between police and guerrilla bands.

RICARDO'S PARENTS, only vaguely informed about national politics, knew they disapproved of Communists, troublemakers who wanted to disrupt and destabilize society. They knew Communism had brought disaster to the Jews in Russia. Their major fear was that their son would get caught up in the turmoil. They urged him to avoid politics and join a Jewish social club such as Maccabi, where he would make nice friends. He should participate more actively in the sports program, take up folk dancing, study Hebrew, go boating, take a girl to a dance. The Jewish institutions were purely social, they were safe, the military would not bother with them. "Gentile politics have nothing to do with us, Ricardo," they said, and encouraged him to spend a year in Israel, perhaps on a kibbutz, a lovely cooperative way of living that they in no way associated with Marxist rhetoric.

But Ricardo was now obeying a different voice from that of his parents: the voice of his peers. He went underground, pausing only to leave a note reminding his parents that the demand for social justice is not absent from the Jewish tradition, feeling a little hypocritical because he could not quote Isaiah (or was it Jeremiah?) in Hebrew but only in Spanish, and disappeared into the *guerrilla*.

Seven years later, when it was all over, Ricardo wrote to his parents from Spain. He had taken part in some guerrilla actions, helped kidnap General Aramburu, and then, when things got too hot, fled the country. He felt at home in Spain by now, was managing a shoe store, had married a local girl and fathered two sons. He had no plans for returning to Argentina, where he might be prosecuted, though he had had nothing to do with the general's murder; if his parents would like to visit him in Spain, that would be nice. Apart from

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missing them all, he was quite happy where he was, who he was.

3.

You open a door off Florida, the down-at-heels pedestrian mall at the heart of Buenos Aires's once-elegant downtown district, pass a security check, and climb the stairs to the United States. In the Lincoln Library, dozens of Argentines are reading American magazines, researching markets or museums, unions or universities, farms or factories, fact or fiction. The library would fit comfortably into the life of a medium-sized American city, but it is a showplace in Argentina, where books are more often condemned to perpetual confinement in unlit dungeons guarded by zealous troglodytes.

The Lincoln Library sponsors lectures on "American" (meaning North American) life; in 1984, there had never been one on Jews, and it struck the director as a timely topic. A year and a half into the presidential term of Raul Alfonsín, the climate of opinion was wide open. Jewish intellectuals were discussing their thoughts on being Jewish over Radio Belgrano every Saturday morning, recitals of Sephardic music were reviewed in the newspapers, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was being staged, and Jewish movie directors had catapulated onto the national screen.

In the light of all this ferment, a public discussion of Jewish life, held under non-Jewish auspices, seemed an innovative but mild venture. My presence in Buenos Aires, and the forthcoming publication of the Spanish edition of my book on Jewish life in Latin America, provided a focus for the evening. Treading lightly, considering how easily anti-Semitic reactions can be triggered, I suggested a panel on the more general topic of cultural pluralism. When we posted our announcement—*"Pluralismo cultural: los judíos en America Latina,"* we did not know whether anyone would come, who our audience would be, or whether we might be bombed, as the Library had been in the past.

My trepidation was not wholly unwarranted. Radio Belgrano was indeed bombed shortly thereafter, and my publisher, opting for political prudence, never brought out the Spanish translation of my book. But that night at the Lincoln Library we drew a full house, made up of both Jews and non-Jews. There were people I had interviewed in the course of my work on the recent repression, students from the adult Jewish education program, regular patrons of the Library, and members of the public totally unknown to any of us, including three men in three-piece wool-worsted pinstriped suits, homburgs, and mustaches, looking out of place among the shaggy intellectuals.

I opened with a discussion of the similarities and differences between the United States and Argentina. Both were countries of mass immigration and both were faced with the challenge of molding people of diverse cultures, social class, and historical experience into one nation. But the solutions they found were quite different. In the pluralistic society of the United States, where religion is privatized and separated from the state, Jews were included within the definition of the nation. In Argentina's monistic society, the unchallenged Catholic faith lying at the core of nationality marginalizes Jews and anathematizes their heritage.

The next speaker, being an Argentine Jew, was more self-confident than I. He had emigrated to Israel and was now back as a missionary to the lost Jews of Argentina, but he spoke with the assurance of one who was among his own people. Passionately, he described the way in which Jews internalize the hostility of non-Jewish society, ending by hating themselves as others hate them. Rejecting their Jewish heritage because it is unacceptable to others, they accept the definition of the Jew that is offered by non-Jews; in essence, they permit anti-Semites to define what a Jew is.

Students from the Jewish adult-education center who filled the front rows were listening attentively, but there was pronounced fidgeting at the back of the hall among the wool-worsted gentlemen. The speaker ignored it. "Only by reimmersing yourself in your authentic tradition can you alleviate this feeling of inauthenticity," he exhorted his audience. "Only by acknowledging the validity of your Jewish heritage and relearning it, living it, can you heal the division within yourselves." I had heard many Jewish educators talk like this in the United States, but I wondered how it would go down in Argentina, where Jewish topics were always addressed in two different vocabularies—one for *them*, one for *us*.

The next morning, I received a telephone call from a man who identified himself as having been present at the Lincoln Library the night before. Could we meet for coffee? On arriving at Le Petit Café, I picked out my interlocutor easily among the crowd, which was made up largely of well-dressed women shoppers and scraggly-bearded students. A three-piece wool-worsted suit, homburg, and mustache came toward me, invited me to a seat at a doily-covered table in a far corner. Over our first cup of coffee, we passed through the usual preliminaries. He seemed especially gratified at the fact that I had come to Argentina to study its Jewish community. Over the second cup, he asked the question he had invited me here to ask. "Do you think Argentina is anti-Semitic?" He fixed me with a gaze that was both quizzical and also, in a way, pleading. Wanting to draw him out, I replied in the negative.

Relieved, he leaned back in his chair. "Of course

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we are not anti-Semitic," he said. "We allowed Jews freely to enter our country (*nuestro país!*). We insist only that they behave like everyone else, be loyal to the same ideals as ourselves. How can we be accused of anti-Semitism? We expect nothing unusual from them, only that they love our country (*nuestro país!*) and not have loyalties elsewhere. Otherwise, let them go to Israel, as that sociologist has done. I do not regard him as Argentine. He is a very poor example of an Argentine, since he abandoned our country (*nuestro país!*). There is no more anti-Semitism here than anywhere else in the world, and always it is for the same reason. They don't want to fit in. They form cliques, they don't want to associate with us, they get together behind closed doors and talk about a foreign country. How can they claim they are oppressed? We welcomed them with open arms. I myself am married to a Jewess; she has no interest in the Jewish thing. Do you suppose that she is 'oppressed'? Do you suppose that I am anti-Semitic?"

Few in number and lacking a political base, Jews in Latin America cannot on their own change the fundamental assumptions of society. They need allies, understandings with other groups whose interest also lies in cultural pluralism, in breaking the monolithic mold. The recent emergence of democratic politics in much of South America offers Latin American Jews—as it does to others—an opportunity to seek such alliances.

In doing so, it is true, their options are limited: by racism on the Right, by hostility to Israel on the Left, by a Francophile style of enlightened thought in the Center that promises everything to the citizen, nothing to the Jew. Nevertheless, there is merit in the effort, so long as one is clear about the problem being addressed. Those who believe that the problem in Latin America is not anti-Semitism but assimilation misconstrue the nature of both anti-Semitism and assimilation. In Latin America they are two sides of the same coin.

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AIDS So Far

Michael Fumento

ONE of the last books published on AIDS in 1990 bore the ominous title, *The AIDS Disaster.* It called for massive spending, at a level the authors admitted would guarantee a great deal of waste, to contain an epidemic growing by leaps and bounds. Yet if anything is clear one decade into the AIDS crisis, it is that the estimates and projections about the epidemic have proved completely wrong.

To be sure, some of those projections were the work of non-authorities, such as Oprah Winfrey's prediction that one-fifth of all heterosexuals would be "dead of AIDS" by 1990, or Gene Antonio's assertion in *The AIDS Cover-Up?* (with claimed sales of 300,000) that by the same year there would be as many as 64 million people in the U.S. infected with HIV. But the more "responsible" estimates were almost as scary. In 1987, in its first cover story on AIDS, which featured the faces of a white man and woman in business dress, *U.S. News & World Report* informed its readers that "The disease of *them* suddenly is the disease of *us* . . . a plague of the mainstream, finding fertile growth among heterosexuals." The article stated:

> By 1991, according to the most conservative estimates, 270,000 people will have been stricken, 179,000 will have died—and new cases involving heterosexuals will have multiplied tenfold to 23,000. Almost 4,000 babies will have contracted the disease by being exposed to the virus while in their mothers' wombs. The Centers for Disease Control [CDC] estimates that 1.5 million Americans now carry the virus but display no symptoms. Others think that number may be as high as four million.

By 1989, the news was worse. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) projected from 300,000 to 480,000 cases of AIDS in the country by the end of 1991; Surgeon General C. Everett Koop quickly embraced the GAO figure.

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International estimates and projections were also horrific. In 1986 the World Health Organization (WHO) predicted as many as 100 million worldwide infections by 1990. While most of these infections were to be in third-world countries, the West, even aside from the United States, would also be hard hit. The British Royal College of Nursing predicted that "A million people in Britain—one in fifty—will have AIDS in six years [1991] unless the killer disease is checked."

We are now in the last quarter of the fateful year 1991. How does the epidemic match up to what *U.S. News* dubbed the "most conservative estimates"? As of the end of August, 188,348 total cases had been reported in the United States, of which 121,196 had ended in death. Heterosexual cases, including among Haitians and Africans, came to 10,279, and 2,696 babies had been diagnosed as having contracted AIDS through their mothers. A mere 727 whites, middle-class or otherwise, are listed as having gotten the disease through heterosexual contact—less than one half of 1 percent of the total caseload. The current CDC estimate for infections since the epidemic began is one million, which includes the almost 187,000 reported cases. Thus, the figure of 1.5 million carriers that "may be as high as four million" turns out to have been closer to 800,000 while actual AIDS cases, even when all 1991 cases will have been reported, will be many fewer than the CDC estimate of 270,000, not to mention the GAO estimate of 300,000 to 480,000.

Elsewhere in the world as well, the epidemic has proved considerably less ferocious than expected. Only slightly more than 4,000 cases have been reported in all of the UK in the course of ten years of the epidemic. As to the fearsome WHO projection, by 1990 it had been scaled down from 100 million to 8-10 million, but even this figure was grossly inflated, in that it stipulated for North America alone one infection per 75 males, at least twice too high.

NOT nearly so many people will get AIDS and die, then, as the CDC and many others had predicted. This much is generally acknowledged. But how has the good news been received?

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As one might expect, those who have been proved wrong have downplayed the importance of the figures and/or come up with far-fetched excuses for their mistakes. In general, the miscalculation has been attributed to "safer sex," meaning abstinence, the use of condoms, or other risk-reduction behavior, or to "new developments," meaning drug therapy involving the use of AZT or inhaled pentamidine (to stave off a particular AIDS-associated pneumonia). Thus, Dr. Sten Vermund, chief of the epidemiology branch of the division of AIDS at the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases: "We have seen what we had always hoped we would see: some kind of measurable public-health benefit from these huge investments that we are making."

The new-developments theory has generally been accepted by the media, and will probably stick. To quote Elizabeth Whelan of the American Council on Science and Health, "It is widely known and accepted that the leveling off in new AIDS cases among homosexual men . . . was the direct result of therapy with AZT." (Whelan, not coincidentally, is one whose projections for the AIDS epidemic have proved far exaggerated.) But in fact AZT did *not* play a significant role, and there has been no tangible result from "these huge investments."

WHAT happened was simple. From 1981 to 1982, diagnosed AIDS cases increased 264 percent. From 1982 to 1983, they increased 170 percent, then 103 percent to the next year. By 1986, the epidemic had slowed to a 63-percent increase from the year before. There is nothing mysterious in this; it is standard procedure for all epidemics, from the Black Death (bubonic plague) to polio to the flu. All epidemics follow a curve which is never linear, never truly exponential. Even as they grow larger they always grow more slowly, until eventually they level and drop off.

Data collected by the CDC and others indicate that HIV had done most of its dirty work by 1985—the year of the first big media scare. Indeed, in some major U.S. cities the incidence of HIV infection had apparently leveled off in homosexual populations by 1982, and in all cities probably by 1984. Since infections begin manifesting themselves as AIDS cases in as little as two to three years (though the median incubation time is about eight to ten years), for the nation as a whole a sudden slowing in the case diagnosis rate would thus have shown up by 1987. And so it did.

Mitchell Gail of the National Cancer Institute, writing in the April 1990 *Journal of Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndromes* (*JAIDS*), notes that reality was veering off from his own projected figures for the epidemic (and those of the CDC) by mid-1987. That *happens* to coincide nicely with the introduction of AZT, to whose prophylactic efficacy Gail credits the downturn. In fact, however, it was not until September 1987 that the drug was available to persons who were not suffering the end-stage disease, that is, persons who could use it for prophylactic purposes, and it was not until mid-1989 that prescriptions for that purpose finally jumped.

Furthermore, in October 1989 it was reported that AZT proved effective in delaying onset of the full-blown disease in only one-third to one-half of all takers. In other words, even among the tiny number of men who may have been using AZT in 1987 for prophylactic purposes, fewer still were likely to be seeing any effect. As for inhaled pentamidine, it was not even approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) until June 1989, although a very few hospitals had begun using it with some AIDS patients as early as 1987. In fact, for the year 1987, according to the CDC, only 7 percent of persons with HIV in a major study group were using *any* kind of drug.

Thus medical developments were far too little and far too late to have affected a disease curve already falling behind projections. This was confirmed by data presented in two different reports by the New York City Department of Health at last year's AIDS conference in San Francisco. Among white males in New York City, AIDS deaths stabilized as early as 1985, with diagnoses among white male homosexuals stabilizing in 1986. One of the papers, by the city's director of AIDS Research, Rand Stoneburner, explicitly challenged the AZT thesis.

Indeed, the Gail thesis contains within it the seeds of its own undoing. Gail asserts that one indicator of the efficacy of AZT prophylaxis is that while the rate of increase among homosexual males dropped off dramatically, intravenous drug abusers (IVDA's) without access to AZT enjoyed no such downturn. Alas, the yearly CDC figures released at about the same time as Gail's article showed that while case reports from male homosexuals increased 8.4 percent over the previous year, non-homosexual IVDA cases increased only 5.1 percent.

Interestingly, for all the acknowledgment of the decline of the epidemic among homosexuals, it seems that nobody wants to talk about the almost equal decline among IVDA's. Over and over again one hears, "Good progress has been made among homosexuals, but the rest of the epidemic continues out of control." Yet nothing could be further from the truth. For one of the big secrets of the AIDS epidemic is that it is declining among *all* risk categories, a point made graphically in a chart in a recent issue of *Science* accompanying an article by Ronald Brookmeyer of Johns Hopkins University. The chart and the accompanying data are all the more interesting since Brookmeyer, like Gail, had previously great-

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ly exaggerated the scope of the epidemic. The chart also shows a flattening of the epidemic long before any therapy was available that could possibly have delayed the diagnosis of full-blown AIDS.*

Did any of this result, as homosexual groups and AIDS educators claim, from safer sex? Safe sex may have played a part with homosexual males; clearly, it has reduced the incidence of male rectal gonorrhea. And since it has also reduced the incidence of hepatitis-B infection in first-time male blood donors in those cities hit hardest by AIDS, it may vitally affect the number of cases in the post-epidemic years to come. But with equal certainty safe sex has played no role among IVDA's, who are getting the disease not from sex but from needle-sharing. Nevertheless, every year the IVDA and homosexual trends have roughly matched up. Giving safe sex the credit for the decline in new infections ignores the saturation effect which applies to *all* diseases—and which explains, for example, why in the 14th century one-half to two-thirds of all Europeans escaped the Black Death. This same saturation effect is now at work among IVDA's and in the AIDS epidemic in general.

If it is now a matter of general agreement that the scale of the epidemic has been overstated, there is still some dispute over how soon an actual plateau will be reached. The main source of the disagreement lies in how one calculates the lag time for newly reported cases. And this is where the issue of heterosexual transmission comes in. Thus, the statistician Peter Plumley, who believes the epidemic itself may have peaked in the third quarter of 1990, also finds that there is still "an upward trend" in the heterosexual portion of the epidemic—not surprising, since cases of heterosexual transmission represent later infections from already infected IVDA's and homosexuals. Even so, says Plumley, it is a "*slowing increase* and perhaps a decrease in what continues to be a very small proportion of the epidemic" (emphasis in original).

Moreover, there is new evidence that many cases of allegedly heterosexual transmission are not that at all. This past April, the CDC undertook a special investigation of such cases in Florida, a state which has reported fewer than 9 percent of all U.S. adult AIDS cases but more than 15 percent of U.S. cases attributed to heterosexual contact. Using medical records and personal interviews, the CDC found that a full 30 percent of these actually belonged in other risk categories. Of the remaining 70 percent, most were Haitians. Then there were those who could not be re-interviewed or who refused to be re-interviewed or who lied upon re-interview. That does not leave many native-born heterosexuals. Since Florida's classification procedures are no better and no worse than those of the other 49 states, it is safe to conclude that the national statistics on heterosexual transmission, low as they are, are significantly overstated.

To the AIDS establishment, this is a particularly worrying development. Randy Shilts, the author of the best-selling AIDS book *And the Band Played On*, confessed in a recent interview, "The AIDS groups were successful in their propaganda effort, saying every heterosexual was about to get AIDS. But they weren't. . . . And once the average heterosexual stopped feeling at profound risk, then the concern just went down to nothing."

Whether one accepts this explanation or not, it is certainly true that coverage of AIDS at the more respectable newspapers has diminished, and what remains is of better quality. The New York *Times*'s reportage on the week-long international conference on AIDS this past spring in Florence, Italy, made but one mention of the possibility of a heterosexual epidemic. The Washington *Post*'s reporter never even alluded to it. One of the three major American newsmagazines ran nothing on the conference at all.

What, finally, of the future?

If the good news is that homosexuals have reduced their risk activity, the bad news is that, as the epidemic slows, they are beginning to relapse. The San Francisco Department of Health has found, for example, that a large percentage of young homosexual men have gone back to engaging in the riskiest of activities, anal sex without a condom. Similarly, in King County, Washington (which includes Seattle), there has been a sharp upturn in rectal gonorrhea in homosexual males.

The increase in risky homosexual behavior is not surprising in the light of the history of sexual diseases. By the early 1930's, according to Allan Brandt in *No Magic Bullet*, approximately one out of every ten Americans suffered from syphilis; each year, U.S. citizens contracted almost half a million new infections. If it reached the nervous system, syphilis could cause insanity, paralysis, or blindness; it was also a leading cause of miscar-

* A complication here is the recent CDC announcement that as of January 1992 it will seek to expand the definition of AIDS to include anyone with HIV who has fewer than a certain number of the type of white blood cell which HIV destroys. The result, according to some epidemiologists, may be as much as a 50-percent jump in reported new cases, as people will be diagnosed with AIDS who have no life-threatening illnesses and in fact may have no disease symptoms whatsoever. Such a jump in reported cases, it bears stressing, will be a result not of anything the epidemic has done, but rather of what the government will have done. This seems to be yet another case of the CDC broadening the definition of the disease to make the epidemic look worse.

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riages, congenital defects, and sterility. Yet people continued to engage in unprotected intercourse. Just so, homosexuals will continue to have "unsafe sex" and intravenous drug abusers will continue to share needles and there will continue to be new HIV infections and new AIDS cases. Perhaps 5,000 a year, perhaps 15,000; no one knows.

Only a highly effective vaccine would bring new AIDS infections to a level anywhere near zero, and that would take massive inoculations over a period of years. In the meantime, as the AIDS educators truly say, "Education is our only weapon." But what the AIDS educators still have not acknowledged is that there is not a thing they or anyone else can do about individuals who insist on engaging in high-risk behavior, short of throwing them into guarded quarantine, a policy which is, of course, totally unacceptable. AIDS cannot be socially engineered out of existence; the best that can be done is to tell people exactly how the disease is transmitted and, especially, who is at greatest risk.

Yet this is precisely what the AIDS establishment, sacrificing scientific accuracy to political correctness, has so far tried desperately *not* to do. And in this area there is no sign of any change. Only recently, a consortium of ad agencies announced that it is seeking $30 million in donated space and air time for advertisements targeted, as the *Wall Street Journal* put it, "at people who still think AIDS is someone else's problem." Targeted, in other words, at white, middle-class heterosexuals. Here we go again.

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The Rise & Fall of Deconstruction

Peter Shaw

THE intellectual and moral disaster that overtook the academic world in the 1970's and 1980's is hardly a secret. Yet so complete, and so unforeseen, has been the transformation of the universities from places of learning to arenas of political confrontation that a satisfactory explanation of what happened is still not available. Somehow, the countercultural ethos of the 1960's came to be embraced by the guardians of culture themselves, in the very institution dedicated to its guardianship. In the end, even the standards of argument on which values rest were discarded along with the values themselves.

Nowhere is the current situation better articulated than in the story of the rise and decline of deconstruction. This arcane intellectual fad, originating in France, seized hold of the American university over the same 20-year period that ended with the domination of radical activism and the "politically correct." But then in 1988 it suddenly became known that the leading American practitioner of deconstruction, the Belgian-born and recently deceased Paul de Man, long a professor at Yale, had been a Nazi collaborator in 1941 and 1942. That de Man's Nazi past had anything to do with deconstruction was hotly denied by many of his colleagues. That it could have anything to do with the present condition of American universities might seem even less likely. But academic reactions to the de Man revelation brought the present and the past into vivid alignment.

In 1987 a graduate student attempting to memorialize de Man by locating his every precious scrap of writing discovered some 180 articles written for Nazi propaganda newspapers, starting soon after the Germans had overrun his native Belgium. De Man was twenty-one at the time he began contributing literary and cultural pieces to these papers; he continued to write in praise of Nazi "culture" and the "Hitlerian soul" through 1942, when it was just beginning to look as though the Germans might lose the war. In one of these articles, de Man expressed satisfaction at the fact that European culture had remained "healthy" despite "Semitic interference in all aspects of European life." Writing not long after the deportation of the neighboring Dutch Jews, de Man raised the possibility of "a solution to the Jewish problem that would lead to the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe."

The friends of de Man, whose "school" of analysis had come to dominate the field of literary studies, first discussed among themselves and then reported publicly on what had been found, promising to release all the articles in due time, in translation from the original Flemish and French. No doubt to their surprise, the announcement made front-page headlines in the newspapers. In the accompanying reports a few academics allowed themselves to be quoted in disparagement of de Man; but most remained silent. Reporters may have sensed a scandal, but without some knowledge of the place of deconstruction in American universities they would have been unable to see that the scandal went beyond the discrediting of a major figure.

David Lehman, a poet and critic with a Ph.D. in English, was one who did. In *Newsweek*, for which he was then working, he wrote a brief account of the affair, and since then he has published a book-length study, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man.** In *Newsweek* Lehman described deconstruction as "a controversial analytic method which turns literature into a play of words, robbing it of any broader significance." He explained that "deconstruction likes putting ideas in question—things like cause and effect, right and wrong, the idea that a text expresses an author's intention." But, Lehman noted, the revelations about de Man cried out for unequivocal judgments on precisely these matters.

That being so, one might have expected that the deconstructionists, having themselves been deceived by de Man, would reject him—if not out of moral revulsion, then simply to distance themselves from his evil. For it soon emerged that a few years after his time-serving of the Nazis, de Man had run away from Belgium to avoid legal action for debt, abandoning his wife and two children in South America. In the United States, where he arrived in 1947, he had then lied about his past to his closest friends, as well as in a written response to charges about that past which he submitted to Harvard University. Yet with one or two exceptions, the leading practitioners of deconstruction reacted to the revelations of de Man's behavior by doubting, denying, or minimizing it, employing circumlocution and euphemism to couch their elaborate responses in a fog of obfuscation.

Thus, de Man was "stupid" (not evil), wrote one leading deconstructionist, Jonathan Culler. "We can accuse" (not "we accuse") and "we

PETER SHAW's *books include* The War Against the Intellect *and* American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution.

* Poseidon Press, 318 pp., $21.95.

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abhor" (not "I abhor"), wrote another, Geoffrey Hartman, a colleague of de Man at Yale. Regarding the most overtly anti-Semitic passage in de Man's wartime writings, Jacques Derrida, the French inventor of deconstruction, asserted, "one has to condemn these sentences [not Paul de Man] . . . which I have just done." But "let us never forget," Derrida urged, the precise contexts of what were, after all, only "pages by a young man of twenty-one or twenty-two." In the end, the "feelings" that won out for Derrida had to do with his "bereaved friendship" with de Man; they were feelings "of immense compassion"—for de Man, not for the slandered and murdered Jews.

Derrida instructed that de Man's Nazi writings called for "the most serious and careful analyses." One analysis of which he approved was Jonathan Culler's, which concluded that accusations of anti-Semitism were exaggerated since de Man had praised Hitler directly and by name "only" once. Indeed, Derrida's own "careful analysis" revealed that in his Nazi writings de Man's "primary" intention—also spotted by another colleague of de Man at Yale, J. Hillis Miller—was to *condemn* "vulgar anti-Semitism." (As the political writer Jon Wiener pointed out in the *Nation*, "even if de Man had published nothing but sports scores or recipes in *Le Soir*, he would properly be defined as a collaborator"—a term Derrida refused to employ.)

In their frantic efforts on de Man's behalf, the leading deconstructionists tripped over one another's exculpations. Derrida declared that "what happened in Brussels in 1940-42"—i.e., de Man's Nazi collaboration, never referred to except indirectly—"cannot, by definition, have anything to do with deconstruction." But Geoffrey Hartman insisted on a profound connection between deconstruction and what happened in Brussels. He argued, and found other deconstructionists to agree, that for de Man, deconstruction itself was no less than "a belated act of conscience" for his past. According to this fantasy, de Man's particular brand of literary criticism constituted a moral act in which he not only repudiated the totalitarianism to which he had been allied, but helped prevent its return.

As if the major deconstructionists had not embarrassed themselves sufficiently, minor ones proceeded inadvertently to expose the qualities of mind that actually lay under the impenetrable mask of deconstructionist jargon. Shoshana Felman, dismissing "the easy judgments made on de Man's historical misjudgments," stated that "in reality we are all implicated—and in more than one way—in de Man's forgetting, and in his silence." Richard Rand demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the current attacks on de Man were themselves anti-Semitic, "for are not, indeed, Paul de Man and his deconstruction somehow overwhelmingly Jewish?"

IN THEIR confrontation with moral challenge, then, the deconstructionists made a spectacle of themselves at once grotesque and disturbing. But they also made a bad tactical error. Had they repudiated de Man as a person, they and their movement would undoubtedly have weathered the storm. Instead, they helped to render the theory of deconstruction vulnerable to attack.

Not that deconstruction had gone altogether unchallenged before then. But in the face of such challenge, deconstructionists had always been able to take refuge in the position that since language is always too slippery to enable us to name or describe anything with complete accuracy, any description of their movement, let alone any analysis, was by definition mistaken. (In the words of Derrida, "All sentences of the type 'deconstruction is X' *a priori* miss the point.") But now in the de Man affair it turned out (as critics like Christopher Butler and John Ellis had been contending all along) that deconstructionists actually did trust language, just like everyone else. Whoever has commented on any of the defenses of de Man by his fellow deconstructionists—efforts at "damage control," Roger Kimball of the *New Criterion* called them—has noticed one or more self-contradictory violations of deconstruction's dogma of indeterminancy. For example, J. Hillis Miller complained of "errors" in the accounts given by critics of de Man, seemingly forgetting that language is supposedly always in error. "All these propositions are false," he fumed: "the facts are otherwise." Suddenly, there again were knowable facts in the world.

The new situation was well summarized by David H. Hirsch of Brown University. In order to defend de Man, Hirsch pointed out, a deconstructionist like Derrida "must sacrifice all of the positions that he has labored two decades to establish":

> Language, it turns out, is decidedly referential; meanings are not necessarily indeterminate; truth not only exists but really does matter; the self does exist and can even be used to elucidate an author's intention. . . .

The same point was made, this time apologetically, by J. Hillis Miller in the course of his defense of de Man:

> Deconstruction is not nihilistic, nor anti-historical, nor mere play of language in the void, nor does it view literature or language generally as free play of language, nor is it committed to the notion that readers and critics are free to make texts mean anything they like.

But either deconstruction was or it was not what it had always previously maintained: an attack on certainty. If it was, then why were deconstructionists now denying it? If it was not, then deconstruction had no point at all. In defending de Man, Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and their followers ended up doing to deconstruction what deconstruction had set out to do to meaning and certainty: they left it in ruins.

But that is not all. By failing to repudiate de Man, the deconstructionists also helped to establish a linkage between, in David Lehman's words, "de Man then and deconstruction now"—the very thing they "presumably wanted to avoid." They gave fuel to the idea that deconstruction itself, far from being a neutral method of inquiry, or (as Geoffrey Hartman tried to suggest) somehow a force for good,

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was compatible with if not actually tied at the root to totalitarian modes of thinking.

IN RIDICULING the very attempt to describe or define them, deconstructionists used to say that what they did was "not a theory" but a "performance." What was called "deconstruction" was really only a disturbing, disruptive "scandal": an activity that "unmasked," "subverted," "dismantled," "exposed," "challenged." Deconstructionists referred self-congratulatingly to their *jouissance*, playfulness. Now, however, faced with an actual scandal, their *jouissance* disappeared, replaced not by sober judgment but by the rage and contempt that deconstruction had always harbored.

Some of that rage and contempt was evident in the terms in which deconstructionists denounced de Man's "hasty, ill-informed, and often vindictive" critics in the media. Not de Man but these critics, they said, were "appalling," and *they* were the ones who had committed "heinous" acts, acts of "violence" (Derrida), of "slander," of "resentment, malice, and undisguised xenophobia." It was they who were "murderous," "obscene," "terrifying," they who employed "totalitarian procedures of vilification."

Despite Derrida's claim, however, no "violence" had been directed at him for defending de Man; the critics were elaborately polite and deferential. But violence aplenty spewed forth from his own rejoinder to those critics. David Lehman compiles a list of the adjectives Derrida heaped on them: abusive, arrogant, crude, degraded, dishonest, grossly wrong, ignorant and aberrant, indecent, murderous, naive, obscene, obtuse, outright laughable, venomous, violent.

In this choice of words, Derrida was only drawing on a vocabulary of denunciation that had marked deconstruction from the beginning. It was significant, for example, that Paul de Man described "writing" as something always "experienced as a dismemberment, a beheading, or a castration." It was he, too, who announced early on that the means of attacking the literary establishment would be the "terrorism" of "ruthless theory." Derrida put it that when it came to changing the world, deconstruction was "not neutral": "Nothing here, without a 'show of force' somewhere." Michel Foucault termed that show of force, often directed at adversaries of deconstruction, "*obscurantisme terroriste*."

ONE source of deconstruction's obsession with violence can be found in the prose of the philosopher usually named as its intellectual progenitor, and whose own Nazi connections have also been the subject of recent new revelations: Martin Heidegger.* Of course, unlike Heidegger, de Man seems never to have been an enthusiastic Nazi or actively involved in doing harm to individual Jews. It seems, instead, that de Man turned to collaboration out of the kind of expediency he later displayed when he absconded from Belgium to avoid prosecution for debt, abandoned his family, became a bigamist, and misrepresented his past (going so far as to hint at having been part of the Resistance, which had in fact denounced him for "excessive" collaboration). Even as a Nazi collaborator de Man mouthed anti-Semitic formulas in an opportunistic way: one does not sense rabid fanaticism in his writings. When deconstruction came along, he took it up with similar *sang froid*. This time, just as he had given sufficient evidence of commitment to the Nazis to satisfy them, so he now gave sufficient evidence of leftism to satisfy his American colleagues.

Nevertheless, despite the differences between them, Heidegger and de Man shared a link. Nor were they alone. As the literary theorist Tsvetan Todorov has pointed out, at least two other French Heideggerians, Maurice Blanchot and Jean Beaufret, were tainted with anti-Semitism. (In an interview in 1986, de Man named the Blanchot of the 1930's as a greater influence on him than Sartre.) Todorov also noted that de Man had written favorably about Hans Robert Jauss, a "former SS member and current leader of the *Rezeptionaesthetik* school" (which is closely allied with deconstruction), and had brought him to Yale as a guest lecturer. All of this rendered positively ludicrous Derrida's confident pronouncement that de Man's collaboration with the Nazis could not, "by definition, have anything to do with deconstruction." Instead the case was as David Hirsch concluded: deconstruction reflected "the Nazi ideology of its origins."

Of course, in ordinary political terms it had traveled some distance from those origins, from the Right to the Left side of the political spectrum. Thus, the original French deconstructionists, openly calling themselves Marxists and radicals, claimed to have discovered the means by which the bourgeoisie had gotten away with its historic crimes of oppression and exploitation—namely, by employing language itself as a weapon of social control. According to this view, the ruling classes, pretending that language was a fixed, dependable reflection of reality, used it to enforce and to ratify the existing division of society into haves and have-nots. The French deconstructionists were dedicated to unmasking this bourgeois imposture by means of their own countertheory of the indeterminacy of language and meaning, and in that sense they considered themselves to be embarked on a politically revolutionary undertaking.

ALTHOUGH the American version of deconstruction was nowhere near so explicit as this, its politics, too, were unmistakable, visible in its rhetoric, in the violent images of decapitation and castration invoked by deconstructionists in their attack on the "bourgeois" understanding of reality, and in their bullying treatment of critics, nowhere more evident than during the de Man affair itself. And that brings us to the role of deconstruction in the current politicization of the universities. Deconstructionists themselves may have intended no escalation of their rhetoric of violence into actual behavior, but there is no blinking the fact that within their world they helped open the way for the present dom-

* See "What Heidegger Wrought," by Mark Lilla, COMMENTARY, January 1990.

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inance of the Left, with its intolerant stifling of dissenting opinions and values.

Deconstruction helped to break down the consensus of reality, and to undermine the belief that language and literature can reliably convey truth. As deconstruction's influence spread from literary studies to the rest of the humanities, history, the law, even architecture, it played a key part in the disintegration of the traditional curriculum, another supposed bastion of "bourgeois" privilege. Into the vacuum thus created moved the minions of the politically correct, ready, precisely on the deconstructionist model of vilification, to "unmask" and anathematize any who resisted the new regime as racist, homophobic, anti-female, Eurocentrist. In short, as Neal Kozodoy wrote apropos of the de Man affair in *Contentions*, "were it not for the labors of the deconstructionists, gaily precipitating the crash of entire edifices of humanist learning, today's hard-eyed Marxists would never have been able to establish so effortlessly their squatters' rights over the rubble."

For the academic class as a whole, the deconstructionist episode has represented a critical test, both intellectual and ethical, which it has failed. Against the nihilist onslaught of deconstruction, most academics simply never lifted a finger in defense of the principles of rationality that supposedly constituted their reason for being. To this day, most have still not spoken up forthrightly either about deconstruction or even about the de Man affair. In the end, it is true, deconstruction has suffered a decline—not, however, because it has been opposed and defeated, but because of the ill-advised response of the deconstructionists themselves to the revelations about one of their heroes, and because the movement has been succeeded by something even worse, for which it paved the way.

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Potomac Fever

SCANDAL: THE CULTURE OF MISTRUST IN AMERICAN POLITICS. By SUZANNE GARMENT. *Times Books/Random House. 352 pp. $23.00.*

Reviewed by PAUL JOHNSON

SUZANNE GARMENT has written a racy and illuminating book which asks important questions. Is the element of corruption in American government growing? Or is it a media illusion produced by new prosecuting mechanisms? If the latter, is America in danger of denying itself the services of many public-spirited and decent men and women by creating a climate in which elected officials are systematically and unfairly harassed by lawyers and journalists seeking dirt at any cost?

As a historian, I never fail to be astonished by the relative incorruptibility of American public life. It is a theory of mine that no political system, however well-thought-out and invigilated, and however permeated by strong religious sanctions, can remain entirely honest if the sums of money at stake are large enough. (I suspect the same principle applies to female chastity.) America is by far the richest country in the world, and has been for over a century. Since the second half of the 18th century or even earlier, rich prizes have always been on offer, first through land speculation, then through industry and services.

It is remarkable that, during the 1780's and 1790's, the young American republic was exceptionally honest while the parent country, Britain, was still run by a system of government patronage. However, while the British began to eliminate corruption during the 1780's—a process known as "economic reform," which was virtually completed in the 1820's—the new republic began to move in the opposite direction. Indeed, James Monroe's second administration, once known as the Era of Good Feelings, might more properly be termed America's first age of corruption.

Mrs. Garment, whose book contains a good deal of fascinating historical material, argues that the sums and numbers of people involved in 19th-century public scandals were small, at least compared with, say, the savings-and-loan affair of today, which may involve anything from $150 billion to $1 trillion. I am not so sure whether it is right to accept this theory of quantitative growth. When the Jackson administration took over in March 1829, to give one example, it was quickly discovered that $500,000—enough to buy 500 square miles of prime agricultural land—had been stolen from the U.S. Treasury, apart from larger thefts involving the army, navy, and Indian contracts. That was a substantial portion of the federal income. Scores of people were involved; 87 officials were discovered to have jail records.

Large-scale thieving from the public continued under Andrew Jackson. He appointed, as Collector of Customs at New York, a job which involved handling bigger quantities of cash than any other on earth (about $15 million a year), a suspect politician named Samuel Swartwout. Four years later Swartwout absconded to Europe with $1,222,705.09 (worth over $1 billion today), the largest single official theft in American history.

Yet, though large-scale corruption has usually been a feature of American politics, and has often involved many different people, it has always been seen as an aberration from the norm, has been universally reprobated, bitterly fought, and often mercilessly punished. For nearly two centuries, waves of corruption have been followed by waves of reform. In the second half of the 19th century, the "robber-baron" epoch of U.S. history was ended by successive and ultimately successful attempts at antitrust legislation, culminating in the great statutes passed under Woodrow Wilson.

Moreover, as Mrs. Garment points out, the sudden scale and speed of industrialization during this period were so enormous as to overwhelm both the administration and Congress: what was remarkable was not so much the wrongdoing as the rightdoing, the amount of progress achieved legitimately, transforming the lives of tens of millions of people. Mrs. Garment also, and justly, draws attention to the positive side of another phenomenon associated with corruption in American history: the city machines. Such institutions as Tammany Hall were the means whereby political power was peacefully transferred from the old ruling elites, like the Albany Regency, to new groups of mass immigrants.

Under the Constitution, the prime role in ensuring that the administration is efficient and honest rests with Congress, and no amount of special prosecutors or legislation specifically passed to remedy current abuses is likely to succeed if Congress is not doing its job, or doing it perversely. The separation-of-powers mechanism can fail in one of two ways. The two administrations of Ulysses S. Grant (1869-77) probably marked the nadir of standards in American government. They were also the culmination of a period when the Republicans not only controlled the administration but exercised overwhelming power in Congress. Under Grant, legislators were more eager to get a piece of the action, notably by reconstructing the South, than to supervise the federal government, and the inevitable followed.

IN OUR own age, it has been the dominance of the Democrats in Congress which has allowed cor-

PAUL JOHNSON, *whose books include* Modern Times *and, most recently,* The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830 *(HarperCollins), writes a weekly column for the London* Spectator.

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ruption to remain unpunished. Mrs. Garment draws attention to the way in which Lyndon B. Johnson got away with it. She could well have devoted considerably more space to this unsavory man, whose case is instructive. Almost from the outset of his career, Johnson was a favorite of Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1941 he fought an unsuccessful campaign in the Democratic Senate primary in Texas, raising and spending $200,000 by blatant criminal tax frauds in violation of the Hatch Act. IRS inspectors got onto him and in due course accumulated overwhelming evidence which could have sent Johnson to jail. On January 13 and 17, 1944, Johnson and his lawyer-fixer Alvin Wirtz went to see Roosevelt in the White House. On the 14th, the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, Elmer Irey, was summoned to the White House, and by the evening of the 17th a new agent was assigned to the case with orders to drop any prosecution and negotiate fines. Treasury Secretary Morgenthau was in no doubt that presidential intervention saved Johnson from prison.

Johnson went on to be President, having survived not only this scandal but the Billy Sol Estes affair of 1962 and the even more dangerous Bobby Baker scandal of 1963. Just as a Democratic Congress, under Franklin D. Roosevelt, had failed to prevent him from using tax investigations for political purposes and many other abuses of power, so in the early 1960's Democratic majorities protected Vice President Johnson. In the Bobby Baker case, which involved the integrity of the Senate, the Democratic majority deliberately slowed the hearings to enable Johnson to remain on the Democratic ticket, and by the time they started he was already President. The hearings were conducted on strictly party lines and when evidence which might have been fatal to Johnson threatened to appear, Everett Jordan, the Democrat from North Carolina who was chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, simply laid down: "We're not investigating Senators."

The same Democratic-controlled Congress which failed to uncover Johnson's links with two major scandals was also remiss in its supervision of his predecessor, John F. Kennedy. Year by year, we learn more of the irregularities and the abuses of power which occurred in the Kennedy White House. The recent testimony by Judith Exner about President Kennedy's links with the Mafia is explicit and disturbing. Why was Congress so comatose at the time? Equally important, why were the media so inattentive or, to use a more accurate word, reticent? Many aspects of Kennedy's behavior which were unworthy of a President, such as his womanizing, were well known to Washington editors and members of the press corps at the time. Why did Kennedy, like Johnson, get away with it? The historian is bound to conclude that both Presidents were protected persons, though Kennedy was protected mainly by the media, Johnson by Congress. But in each case the pro-

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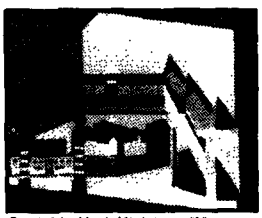

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tecting agent was predominantly Democratic.

UNDER Richard Nixon the machinery went into reverse, and here we come to the second way in which the separation-of-powers mechanism can malfunction. When the White House and Congress are controlled by rival parties, as happens increasingly in America, the invigilating and redressing power of Congress can be exercised in a destructive manner. This occurred under Nixon. Nixon was tried by the media, and Kennedy and Johnson by nobody, and it is a matter of historical judgment which of the three offended more against constitutional order. In my opinion, Nixon was the least guilty of the three. There can be little doubt that, if the Republicans had controlled Congress, Nixon would have completed his term with little difficulty and the notion of an impeachment would not even have been canvassed. (It is worth noting that the only other presidential impeachment, of Andrew Johnson in 1869, was a strictly partisan affair launched for political reasons.) As it was, the success of the media-Democratic vendetta against Nixon, and its tragic aftermath, led to a vacuum of power in Washington and a hiatus in the exercise of American authority in the world, with disastrous consequences both for the U.S. and its allies; not until the Reagan presidency was it possible to begin the restoration of America's self-confidence and global prestige. In my view, without the absurdities of Watergate, the collapse of Soviet Communism would have begun to occur in the late 1970's rather than the 1980's.

That, of course, is speculation. What is not speculation is the contention in Mrs. Garment's book that Democratic Congresses, by devising special acts and procedures for the prosecution of public officials, in conjunction with "investigative journalists" of the media, overwhelmingly Democratic or even radical, have between them developed a culture of mistrust toward those in power which has made good government—that is to say, courageous government, willing to take calculated risks and make unpopular decisions—far more difficult. Mrs. Garment gives many instances of the way in which the new legal-enforcement agents have become part of what she terms "a self-reinforcing scandal machine."

"Scandal politics" are, perhaps inevitably, an important part of what I term Media Democracy, the system of government under which, increasingly, all advanced Western peoples live. But in America scandal politics have been institutionalized. Mrs. Garment writes that, in the pursuit of political victims, "Prosecutors use journalists to publicize criminal cases while journalists, through their news stories, put pressure on prosecutors for still more action." Scandal politics certainly deter the honest from seeking office. What is not clear is whether the new climate of mistrust is making public life cleaner. As Mrs. Garment points out, more and more cases of misconduct appear to be occurring, or at least coming to light. Obviously, if honest men and women will not run for office, their places will be taken by the less scrupulous. And fear of exposure has never deterred real adventurers.

MRS. GARMENT'S book clearly makes the case for a fresh look at the way the United States upholds standards of conduct in the federal government. To a British observer, certain defects in the U.S. system are obvious. The law of libel gives those who hold or seek office far too little protection. They are obliged to prove not only that their accusers knew that the defamatory information they published was false but that they were motivated by express malice. Moreover, accused public officials are often tried and convicted by the media, themselves reporting deliberate leaks provided by congressional committees or investigating agencies, long before the accused can get access to any kind of legal process. Here, the ancient notion of contempt of court, which goes back to the 12th century, is in unresolved conflict with the First Amendment.

But these are comparatively minor points. The truth, I suspect, is that the American system will not

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strike the proper balance in the pursuit of corruption in office until it tackles the larger and more serious problem of congressional tenure. The Democratic imbalance in Congress, especially in the House of Representatives, cumulatively created by the difficulty in ousting long-tenured Democrats, makes the legislature lax in monitoring government during the rare Democratic administrations, and overzealous, indeed vindictive, in investigating the far more frequent Republican ones.

But that is only one of the evils produced by long tenure. Recent legislation makes it increasingly hard for Congressmen to add to their salaries by activities outside politics, especially by the traditional practice of law. The ban is well-intentioned, but it tends to create a class of professional politicians who go into politics for life and who know no other kind of occupation. Such a class is inimical to the spirit of the Constitution. It creates a cast of mind remote from the real life of the country, and the isolation is increased by living in an artificial federal capital whose only activities are politics and government.

That is one reason why the United States has such a huge budget deficit, its rulers spending vast sums they do not dare to collect from the taxpayers, so mortgaging the future. In such an unreal atmosphere of profligacy, the ordinary rules of personal morality appear to be in suspense, and it is not surprising that men and women elected or appointed to the system, who in any other circumstances would be scrupulous, are tempted and succumb. Special prosecutors will not cure this malady. They will merely keep out the truly incorruptible.

America is still at heart a high-principled, idealistic nation, with an intense yearning for its affairs to be conducted with total probity. That is why it has supported enforcement procedures which do more harm than good and of which Mrs. Garment rightly and impressively complains. But in the end, the only way to reduce corruption in government is to reduce the size of government.

Reforming the Schools

WE MUST TAKE CHARGE: OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR FUTURE. By CHESTER E. FINN, JR. *The Free Press. 365 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by JAMES Q. WILSON

THERE are essentially three kinds of remedies for the widely acknowledged shortcomings of our schools. (I do not consider simply spending more money on schools a remedy.) The first, usually proposed by people whose information comes from intensive classroom visits or who themselves have been teachers, is that the ethos of the classroom and the techniques of the teacher must be altered, and that this can be done if only teachers and principals would better understand how learning occurs. A good example of this approach is Theodore Sizer's book, *Horace's Compromise.* There are many others. Out of such fine-grained, up-close examinations of teaching and learning we get a vivid picture of those classrooms that work and those that do not, and ideas for how to turn the latter into the former.

The second kind of remedy, often proposed by economists and political scientists and based on aggregate data about school achievement, proceeds from the argument that the organization of the school, and especially of the public-school system, is faulty. Schools that succeed are those that empower principals, compete for students, and resist the suffocating constraints of a central bureaucracy. *Politics, Markets, and Schools,* by John Chubb and Terry Moe, is the most recent and best-documented book

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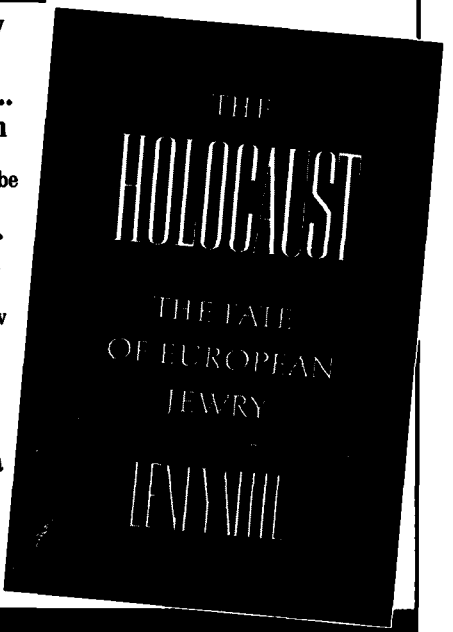

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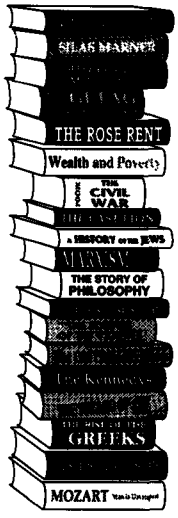

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propounding this thesis, which revolves around the idea of choice. But the idea itself has been around at least since Milton Friedman suggested it quite some time ago; many of the data with which to support the case for choice have been gathered by James Coleman and his colleagues.

The third remedy, proposed chiefly by past and present government officials, is based on the view that the rules by which teachers are accredited, curricula approved, schools judged, and students graduated are faulty. To change behavior we should change the rules. For many years the preferred changes were those that told teachers how and what to teach; of late they have come to focus on what students ought to know. The new book by Chester E. Finn, Jr. follows largely in this tradition. Its title, *We Must Take Charge*, conveys its message: accountability.

It is easy to see why these competing perspectives are held by those who hold them. Teachers, and those with a lot of first-hand knowledge about teaching, want to liberate instructors and encourage them to enter into a more constructive partnership with their students. Though not necessarily opposed to changes in structure or rules, they are suspicious because in the past most such plans have been the work of naive outsiders whose misguided efforts have put unrealistic burdens on overworked teachers. By contrast, economists and political scientists believe that any reform which relies on persuading poor teachers to become gifted ones, while it may succeed in isolated cases, is doomed to failure because it neglects the incentives operating on teachers and the institutions within which they work. As for government officials, they know that they cannot motivate teachers or manage classrooms, and suspect that it is utopian to think that any broad-scale plan for parental choice will be adopted by more than a fraction of the thousands of school systems in the country. The best that can be done is to have rules specifying outcomes: requirements for graduation or tests of student achievement.

Finn, who was an Assistant Secretary of Education under William J. Bennett and who has been a key adviser to the new Secretary, Lamar Alexander, has produced the best case we are likely to find for the accountability strategy. Apart from the fact that accountability may be easier to achieve than either revitalization or reorganization, Finn's case rests on a powerful insight: though Americans think that in general our schools are doing poorly, they also think that the schools their own children are attending (or, in the case of teachers, the schools in which they are working) are doing just fine. If that is true, then it would be foolish to expect parents to demand broad structural changes or teachers to embrace new classroom methods.

Despite the countless tests, polls, books, articles, and television specials about our failing students, Finn believes that most parents are still, as he puts it, "asleep at the wheel." They are victims of the Lake Wobegon Effect: any given child and any given school is above average. In 1988, American thirteen-year-olds took part in an international achievement test. Though our children got the lowest scores in mathematics, in response to a background question they said that they thought they were doing the best. In other countries, students did much better than the Americans but did not believe they were doing as well as they should. This was not an isolated instance. Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan has repeatedly found that American students think they are among the best students in math (though in fact they are among the worst), whereas Japanese and Taiwanese pupils do not think they are among the best (though in fact they are).

Parents hold the same distorted perspective. Over 90 percent of the mothers surveyed in one study thought their children's schools were doing an excellent or good job, twice the fraction of Chinese and Japanese mothers with this view.

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The reason for this schizophrenia, Finn suggests, is that for decades American children have been bringing home report cards showing good grades even though on national and international achievement tests they are doing poorly. Why do parents not notice the contradiction? For one thing, the grim test data are typically reported for the nation as a whole, or sometimes for a state or region, but not for individual schools. Though SAT scores are falling and U.S. students are flunking international math and geography tests, these numbers can be ignored by parents on the assumption that they apply to other people's schools and other people's children. For another thing, there are complex methodological factors that cause all of the six major national achievement tests to place almost everybody above average. According to one survey, not one of the 50 states was below the national average in elementary-school achievement levels, and 90 percent of local school districts were above average. Small wonder that most parents and children think that things are fine when in fact they are not.

WHY do we tolerate a testing system that misleads us? The answer, as is so often the case with governmental failure, is that it is not in the interests of any of the key players to have an honest system. Many professional educators are deeply opposed to standardized tests because they violate the child-centered philosophy of education: there should be no fixed standards for achievement, there should only be variable, relative standards tailored to the needs of the individual child. (I am reminded of the comparable view in penology: there should be no fixed punishments for a crime, only sentences tailored to the needs, character, and rehabilitative potential of each offender.) Naderite advocacy groups insistently argue that standardized tests are culturally biased, though in fact the best are not. Elected officials reinforce these theories for their own reasons. They do not want test results reported for individual schools, districts, or states because such data might be used to compare schools, districts, and states in ways that would be embarrassing for their constituents and thus for themselves.

As a result, when the federal government created the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1969, Congress ensured that it would publish results only for the nation as a whole and for regions within the nation. When Secretary of Education Bennett tried in 1987 to remedy this defect, Congress again ensured that the NAEP would not be used to compare children, classrooms, schools, or school districts. Efforts to improve testing so that it could be used to close the gap between low actual achievement and high perceived achievement were met, in Finn's words, by a determined effort to shoot the messenger.

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GIVEN the absence of clear educational goals and individually reported tests to measure progress toward those goals, Finn is not surprised to find that proposals from the first group of reformers—the teacher-centered, classroom-oriented ones—make so little headway. When Maine offered extra money and freedom from burdensome rules to ten schools, not one applied. When Massachusetts provided funds for seven schools to restructure their programs, only one applied. When New York City School Chancellor Joseph Fernandez asked each school to tell him what it would do if it had the freedom to innovate, only one in six responded, and half of those responses were unsatisfactory. Theodore Sizer, the most skilled and determined of the classroom-oriented reformers, has built up a network of like-minded school officials called the Coalition of Essential Schools, but he has faced exactly the same problem—resistance to change from within.

In general, Finn makes quite clear that the central issue is not money. In real (that is, inflation-adjusted) dollars, per-pupil spending on public education has tripled since the mid-1950's and doubled since the mid-1960's. It rose by nearly 30 percent in the 1980's alone, and the average teacher salary rose by 27 percent in the same decade. By 1990-91, the average public-school teacher was earning (on a twelve-month basis) the equivalent of $44,000 per year. At the same time the number of pupils in the classroom has gone down. Between 1961 and 1986, median classroom size fell in the elementary schools from 30 to 24 and in secondary schools from 27 to 22. In 1966 the median number of pupils per teacher per day was 130; in 1986 it was 105.

Yet despite the fact that we are spending more money than ever before, we are not getting better results. Part of the reason, now so well-established by scholarship that only an officer of the National Education Association could deny it, is that there is no relationship between spending and outcomes, at least over the range of variation that we observe in this country's schools. Another part is that a lot of the increased spending never finds its way to the classroom but is siphoned off by school-district bureaucracies. For example, only one-third of the $6,100 per student that New York City spends on education reaches the classroom; half the money goes to pay for citywide management, and another one-sixth goes to school management.

FINN wants to reform education by emphasizing outputs rather than inputs. He wants the schools to become accountable to parents and the public. Accountability rests on a tripod: there must be clear goals, reliable information on how to get to those goals, and strong incentives to attain them. In his view, none of the three legs is strong enough.

Though Finn makes many recommendations, the ones that are developed at greatest length concern the first two legs of the tripod. He wants the national government to set clear goals for learning, and to ensure that reliable tests exist that will measure the progress of individual students and schools. As I write, a National Council on Education Standards and Testing, co-chaired by Governors Carroll Campbell of South Carolina and Roy Romer of Colorado, is at work on these matters. Finn is a member. It will be an uphill fight, given the resistance of so many professional educators to either goals or testing (and given the fact that Keith Geiger, president of the National Education Association, is also a member of the Council).

Skepticism about national goals and tests is not confined to educators or the political Left, however. Many non-educators and political conservatives also have worries. Finn acknowledges this and is at pains to rebut many of the objections from all sides. He notes, correctly, that the claim that tests are biased is generally wrong (although, curiously, he does not marshal the impressive body of studies that demonstrates this). He admits that many teachers will "teach the tests," but observes, wisely, that if the tests are any good this would be a good thing—or at least a better thing than letting them teach materials with little bearing on cognitive achievement. He acknowledges that standardized multiple-choice tests often measure memory more than they do learning, but points out that essay questions can be a large part of national tests, as they already are in England, France, Germany, Japan, and many other nations, without any obviously harmful effect on local educational levels. Hundreds of thousands of American high-school students are also given essay questions in the New York Regents exams and the private Advanced Placement tests.

This whole approach can be expanded; testing need not mean legions of students using Number 2 pencils to fill in little boxes. Indeed, the effect of some recent efforts at expanded testing has been quite dramatic. Barbara Lerner has reported ("Good News About American Education," COMMENTARY, March 1991) that the use of minimum-competency tests beginning in the 1970's has led to dramatic gains, especially among black pupils. She terms this the only truly successful educational reform in recent decades.

GOALS and tests have indisputable advantages. The problem for many people, myself included, is whether there should be *national* goals and national tests at all. Finn's experiences in Washington have left him more optimistic than I am about what can be accomplished by the federal government or a National Council on Education Standards and Testing. Not that I am a libertarian, or a reflexive advocate of minimalist government; I am simply a person whose service on national commissions and studies of politics have been sobering experiences.

I am also the president of the American Political Science Association (APSA), and in that capacity I am kept informed by the Association's staff of the National Council's efforts to produce goals. I have learned that initially the Council did not seem inclined to include civics and government among the standards. Needless to say, the APSA has endeavored to correct that oversight. I am pleased by the prospect but suspicious that other

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organizations, less deserving than the APSA, will also be successful in lobbying the Council. I assume that neither the Flat Earth Society nor the Ku Klux Klan will prevail, but who will? For possibilities, consider the individuals and groups that persuaded New York State Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol to embrace the loonier aspects of multiculturalism. Or consider the examples given by Finn himself: a California statute demands that students acquire a true comprehension of the rights and duties of American citizenship, "including kindness toward domestic pets," and a California commission, undeterred by the barbs thrown its way by *Doonesbury*, urges the teaching of "self-esteem" as required by "new-age thinking." Do not dismiss these as the excesses of Lotus Land; California may lead the nation, but it is not different from it.

Now, it *is* quite possible to design national tests that will assess the intellectual skills considered vital by virtually everybody. The minimum-competency tests evaluated by Barbara Lerner are an example. But is it possible to do that, and only that, if you entrust the task to a broadly representative national commission that must obtain congressional assent to its recommendations? Finn seems to think so; I hope he is right, but I doubt it. Instead, I envisage the triumph of the same sorts of interest-group politicians and lathered ideologues who now shape "policy" on almost every social issue, from teenage pregnancy to abortion funding, and, at the state level, on educational policy itself.

This is why I prefer parental choice to national accountability. It is only one leg of Finn's tripod, but it is the least dangerous one: parents deciding what constitutes a good education and voting with their feet and their pocketbooks to enforce those decisions. Some schools will respond by giving out reliable test scores, some will respond by blathering about self-esteem, and some, doing neither, will go out of business. Tests will proliferate, some under public auspices, some under private ones. States and districts will differ about which tests, if any, they use or require. We will have a chance to learn what works and what does not.

In several places Finn endorses parental choice and refers approvingly to the book by Chubb and Moe, but his heart seems to be in test-driven accountability. He wants to have local choice *and* national goals *and* national tests. So, I judge, would the Bush administration, since it has formed a council on goals and testing but not one on choice. But there is an unseen political bias in this evenhanded approach: goals (if stated generally enough) can be adopted, tests (if made politically palatable) can possibly be adopted, but choice is a far more difficult enterprise and one, therefore, likely to be either traded away or left at the starting post.

Let me make clear what does not worry me: I do not worry that national goals will fail to include my own pet subjects, be they spelling, geography, or pride in nation. Nor do I really worry that national goals will make it easier for some local high school to teach black nationalism or Iroquois political theory. I worry that the political capital expended on goals and tests will leave the vital third leg of the tripod, incentives, too weak to carry its important share of the load. And I also worry that our nation is too big and too diverse to enable us to spell out wisely any educational requirements beyond competency in the essential skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Our national goal should not be to get Mary and Johnny to read *The Federalist Papers*, Mark Twain, or Herman Melville, but to get them to read *anything*—seriously, frequently, and with comprehension. We should care that our students write, but I care little what they write about, so long as they write a lot, write under criticism, and have to make corrections.

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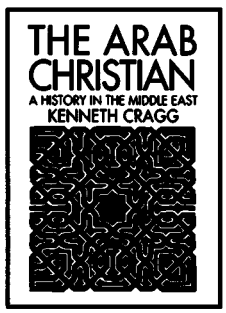

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When former Secretary of Education Bennett set forth the curriculum for his ideal "James Madison High School," he was asking the nation to imagine an educational world which, right now, cannot exist and, for many pupils, should not exist. If, beyond basic competency in the three R's, some of our schools were to teach carpentry, cooking, or auto mechanics, I would be pleased—so long as they produced excellent carpenters, cooks, and mechanics. I would not even mind if they omitted civics. Aristotle remarked that politics cannot be taught to the young; I would only add, certainly not by some of the people I see trying to do it. But please do not report to the American Political Science Association that I said this.

Revising the Victorians

POVERTY AND COMPASSION: THE MORAL IMAGINATION OF THE LATE VICTORIANS. By GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB. *Knopf. 466 pp. $30.00.*

Reviewed by PETER L. BERGER

EVER since Lytton Strachey's 1918 hatchet job, *Eminent Victorians*, the Victorian age has had a bad press among *bien-pensant* intellectuals: the very adjective has come to be synonymous with all that is repressed, hypocritical, moralistically meddlesome. The same view holds in the area of social reform: the Victorians oppressively imposed their bourgeois values on a reluctant working class, and were particularly addicted to the habit which American liberals now call "blaming the victim."

This disagreeable stereotype has been challenged before, but never in a more exhaustive and sustained fashion than by the eminent historian Gertrude Himmelfarb. In book after book she has brilliantly illuminated the Victorian period of British history—to the point where those who have followed her career have begun to think of that period as the Himmelfarbian age—and in the process she has demonstrated just how short the stereotype falls of complex reality. The present book picks up the story at the point where Miss Himmelfarb left it at the end of *The Idea of Poverty* (published in 1984). There she dealt with the social thought and social programs of the early Victorians; here she deals with their successors in the latter part of the century, and with the continuities and discontinuities with what had gone before.

The most important continuity lies in the quality of moral fervor which characterized both Victorian cohorts as they attacked whatever they considered to be a social problem. These were very serious people indeed, whose moral commitment remained very much in evidence even when they were claiming to go about the business of reform in a scientific manner. Their fervor clearly had its roots in the stern morality of Evangelical Protestantism, in that "Nonconformist conscience" which had animated the campaigns against the slave trade and against child labor, and which arguably was at the basis of most if not all the reform initiatives of the early 19th century.

But the late Victorians differed from their predecessors in two important respects. First, the impulse of compassion had become considerably secularized, severed from its religious roots. And second, a shift had occurred in the definition of the social problem itself—more specifically, a shift in the categorization of those deemed to be the proper targets of benevolence.

Miss Himmelfarb discusses the first difference quite extensively, but it is the second that interests her more. She exemplifies it by comparing two works, each of which had a great influence in its respective period: Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, published in 1849, and Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, the first volume of which was published forty years later, in 1889.

Both authors studied various groupings within the lower classes, but Mayhew's reformist intentions were primarily directed toward what we would today call the underclass—in his words, "Those That Will Not Work." It was they who, to Mayhew's mind, constituted the problem. The larger population of the poor was not a problem in itself, since poverty was after all a natural condition; rather, the issue here was to prevent these poor from becoming altogether pauperized and thus falling into the lower depths of the underclass.

For Booth, too, the core of the problem was the underclass, which had to be massively (and rather harshly) dealt with. But his *benevolent* interest was directed at the groupings above the underclass, the people whom he affectionately called "my poor." Their poverty was not considered by him a natural condition about which nothing should be done; on the contrary, these "respectable" poor should be helped to improve their position—albeit in such a way as not to undermine their "respectability," which consisted precisely in their sense of individual responsibility and their willingness to take care of themselves.

Beatrice Webb, Booth's cousin by marriage, would describe him as a perfect representative of what she called the "Time-Spirit," both because of his devotion to an allegedly scientific method and because he had switched the impulse to serve from God to man. As Gertrude Himmelfarb portrays him, he was indeed a prototype, and a very influential one at that. A successful businessman, he was engaged full-time in running the steamship company he owned. By all accounts he enjoyed his life as a businessman. But, driven both by conscience and (one may assume) by innate curiosity, and despite persistent ill health, he devoted all his spare time to the gigantic enterprise that eventually filled seventeen volumes (the last one came out in 1902). His conscience, as Beatrice Webb accurately observed, was a highly secularized one. Booth was a Unitarian (his wife remained a churchgoing Anglican and the two prudently decided not to discuss religion), but he also described himself as a Positivist. "As to religion," he wrote in a lofty and quite nebulous confessional statement, "I mean that I worship Humanity."

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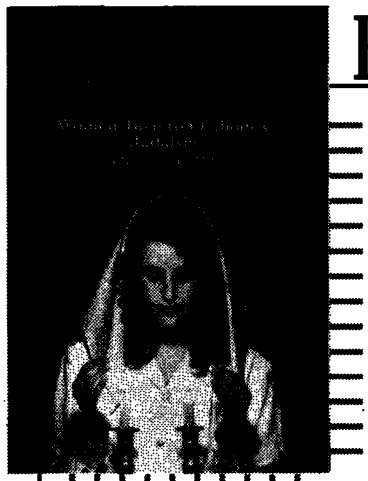
Booth distinguished four classes below the poverty line. Class A was what we would call the underclass. Class B were people with casual earnings, the "very poor." Classes C and D, those with intermittent and those with regular but low earnings, together constituted the "poor"—*his* poor. There were further differentiations *above* the poverty line, but they did not figure in his definition of the social problem.

What did Booth propose to do about each of these various categories? Only the lowest two classes, A and B, were to be objects of state policy, of "socialism" (a pejorative term in his usage). Class A, indeed, was already being taken care of by the laws against pauperism and vagabondage, as exemplified in the institution of the workhouse. Class B too was similarly to be put under "socialist" tutelage, housed in "state industrial homes" and compelled to work on state projects under threat of being remanded to the even more restrictive regime of the workhouse. Those in classes C and D, however, were to be respected as "individualists," objects not of state policy but of private (and typically intermittent) help that would allow them to lead better lives despite their poverty, a condition for which (unlike the denizens of the lowest classes) they should not be blamed.

Miss Himmelfarb discusses at length many other actors in the late Victorian drama of compassion. There was the Charity Organization Society, or COS, founded in 1869 to help the "deserving poor." This became the most important private agency of social welfare, basing its activities on "social science" (defined as "the science of doing good and preventing evil"!) and originating the casework method. There was the Salvation Army, founded in 1878 by William Booth (no relation to Charles) and marked by an unreconstructed Evangelical emphasis. And then there was a long line of individuals whom she sharply profiles: the founders and activists of Toynbee Hall (a sort of university for the poor), T.H. Green (who gave Hegelianism a quaintly English twist), Alfred Marshall (creator of an "economics of chivalry"), and a motley crowd of socialists (Marxist and otherwise), utopian visionaries, and socially conscious cranks. Toward the end appear the Fabians, led by Sidney and Beatrice Webb but also comprising a great number of more or less endearing eccentrics, from George Bernard Shaw to Annie Besant, the founder of the international Theosophical movement. It is impossible to do justice here to this colorful gallery, but it should be observed that Miss Himmelfarb's book can be read for the pleasure of the company she presents even if one has no great interest in the larger issues.

The Fabians constitute the bridge between Victorian social reform and the 20th-century British welfare state. They—for whom, of course, "socialism" ceased to be a pejorative term—sharply repudiated the individualistic ethic of Charles Booth and his kind and gave a collectivistic turn to the moral fervor of the Victorians. It is clear that Miss Himmelfarb is not overly fond of them, and perhaps her portrait of them is not quite accurate. Still, one must wonder about the moral sensibilities of someone like Beatrice Webb, who could approvingly cite a plan for the underclass as "a great social drainage scheme" which would "get rid of the festering heaps and scientifically treat the ultimate residuum." No wonder that she, along with her husband and many of their fellow-Fabians, were later to be counted among the most uncritical admirers of the Soviet Union.

Out of the Fabian version of socialism came William Beveridge and other theorists of the welfare state. Here the concept of poverty was both de-moralized and relativized. Questions of individual responsibility were to be separated from social policy, and the poverty line was to be ongoingly movable. The problem now was no longer



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the poor, however categorized, but the working class as a whole. Eventually, the issue would no longer be defined as one of poverty at all, but as one of equality. All of society would become the object of social reform on the part of the state—precisely what Charles Booth and his contemporaries had denigrated as "socialism."

AN ARGUMENT that recurs throughout this book concerns the "moral imperialism" of Victorian social thought. It has been a common notion, and not only on the Left, that the Victorian reformers sought to impose middle-class values and styles of life on the poor. Miss Himmelfarb rejects this view. The "respectability" so dear to the Victorians was not just a value of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it was at the core of the aspirations and the culture of the working class itself. Booth and most of the others discussed by Miss Himmelfarb were very solicitous of that culture.

Thus, Booth opposed the temperance movement because it showed a lack of understanding of the social role of the public house, and the COS warned its caseworkers against any show of condescension or disrespect toward the poor. The two exceptions were the Salvation Army—and later on, the Fabians. The Salvation Army put on its banner the motto "Blood and Fire"—referring to Evangelical notions of salvation. It took the socialism of the 20th century to concretize, in an ironic and horrible way, the idea that the poor were indeed to be saved by blood and fire.

Early in this book Miss Himmelfarb warns us against the "Whig fallacy" of looking at the past in terms of the present. But in her conclusion, while reiterating that the problems of the Victorians were different from our own, she does look at the "lessons" they may hold for us. Most importantly, she proposes that the Victorians were right in insisting that poverty is a multilayered phenomenon, and right in insisting that it has a centrally important moral component. Both insights have been lost in much of 20th-century social thought and policy. It is not the Victorians but many of our own contemporaries who can be fairly described as "moral imperialists." In Miss Himmelfarb's own words:

> After making the most arduous attempt to objectify the problem of poverty, to divorce poverty from any moral assumptions and conditions, we are learning how inseparable the moral and material dimensions of that problem are. And after trying to devise social policies that are scrupulously neutral and "value-free," we are finding these policies fraught with moral implications that have grave material and social consequences.

For clarifying these hard truths with incomparable learning and persuasiveness, Gertrude Himmelfarb's superb study performs a necessary service not only of historical rectification but of great social and even moral import.

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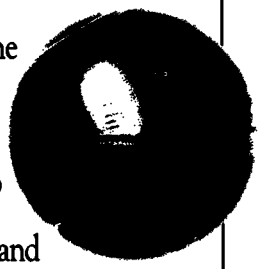

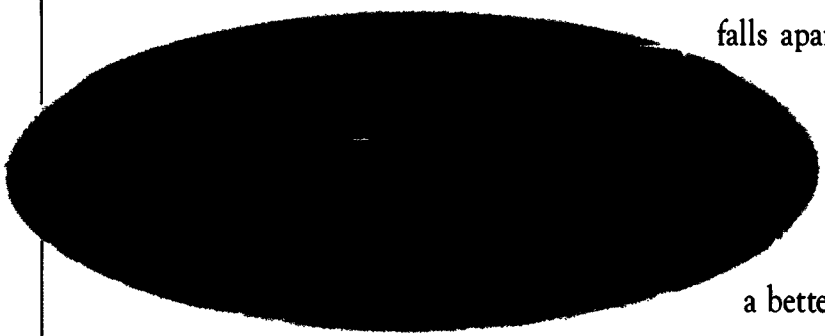

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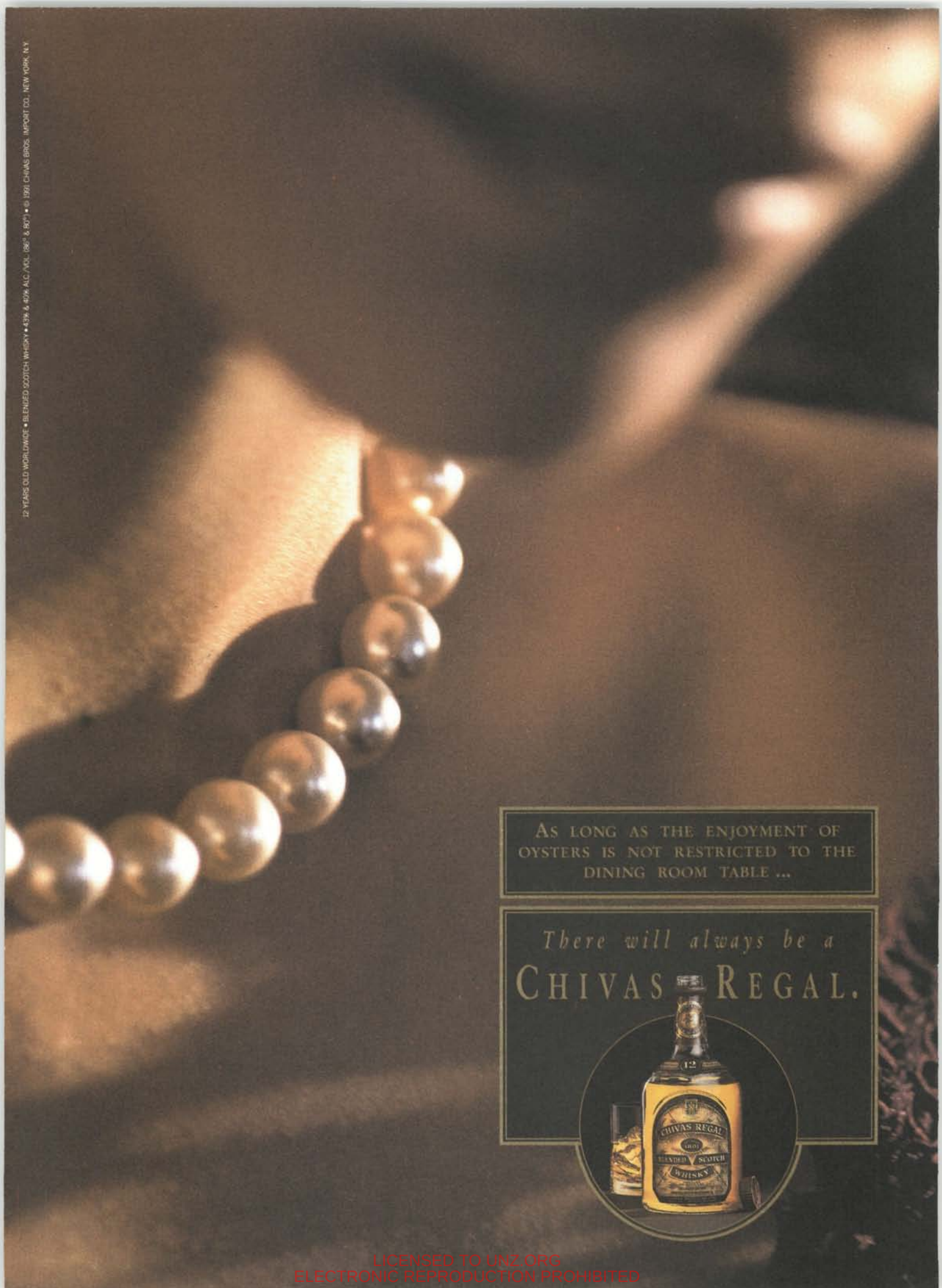
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